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Paul et Virginie:
Christianizing Rousseau à la Fénelon

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Paul et Virginie:
Christianizing Rousseau à la Fénelon

by

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Dedication

For Michael, in many ways

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Abstract

Paul et Virginie: Christianizing Rousseau à la Fénelon

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This thesis presents Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie* (1788) as a synthesis of the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the theology of François de la Mothe-Fénelon. While the novel's prominent themes of the goodness of nature and the corruption of society are clearly associated with Rousseau, Bernardin rejects Rousseau's ideals of independence and self-sufficiency as the basis for his moral theory and preference of nature. Instead, his novel appears to Christianize Rousseau's philosophy by stressing dependence on a personal, beneficient God who is revealed through nature, thereby associating the natural life with a God-centered life where happiness can be found through dependence on God and selfless service to others. In seeking to pinpoint Bernardin's Christian influence, this paper goes on to acknowledge Bernardin's hyperbolic praise for François Fénelon, which leads to an investigation concerning, first,

which of Fénelon's teachings can be found in *Paul et Virginie*, and second, how Bernardin manages to preserve such enthusiastic admiration for a Christian thinker while also denying several important tenets of Christian orthodoxy. This investigation reveals that Fénelon appealed to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre not only on the basis of what he emphasized, but also what he failed to emphasize. On the one hand, a number of Fénelonian ideas find expression in *Paul et Virginie*, ideas such as a conception of worship that privileges inner realities over external performances; a glorification of pure, disinterested love toward God; an ideal lifestyle of simplicity and harmony with nature; and an acknowledgement of the role of sentiment in gaining knowledge of the divine. On the other hand, this paper also proposes that Bernardin's unhindered admiration for Fénelon was made possible by his ability to misinterpret two of Fénelon's most well-known works, *Télémaque* (1699) and the *Traité de l'existence de Dieu* (p. 1718), whose silence on particular doctrines like original sin and the authority of the Scriptures allowed Bernardin to preserve his beliefs about natural goodness and the sufficiency of natural revelation.

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Introduction

PAUL ET VIRGINIE

"This novel encompasses the culmination of my entire philosophy," wrote Bernardin de Saint-Pierre before the publication of his 1788 novel *Paul et Virginie*.[1] While *Paul et Virginie* is perhaps best known for its pastoral style and poignant plot that made it a treasured work among the nineteenth-century Romantics, its author clearly intended it as a philosophical text.[2] The novel first appeared in a supplementary volume of the third edition of the author's *Études de la nature* (1784) as a fictional exemplification of the theories contained therein. Above all, the *Études* present the workings of nature as a harmonious system designed and driven by an orderly, beneficent, and personal Creator. In addition, the *Études* offer a harsh critique of all scientific and artistic endeavors when dissociated from God and morality. Building on these themes, the novel *Paul et Virginie* serves to demonstrate the author's theory of happiness. Bernardin clearly reveals his motives for writing in his forward to the text. He writes:

> I wanted to unite the beauty of nature in the tropics with the moral beauty of a small community. I also intended to bring to light several great truths, among others, this one: that our happiness consists in living according to nature and virtue.[3]

Bernardin's association of virtue with nature and simplicity contrasts sharply with the contemporary discourse of many Enlightenment philosophers, who argue that virtue is

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[1] "Ce roman renferme le résultat de toute ma philosophie." Cited in Fabre, "Paul et Virginie, Pastorale," 178. All translations are my own.

[2] *Paul et Virginie* is said to have influenced such celebrated authors as Chateaubriand, Balzac, George Sand, Baudelaire, Lamartine, and Flaubert.

[3] "J'ai désiré réunir à la beauté de la nature entre les tropiques la beauté morale d'une petite société. Je me suis proposé aussi d'y mettre en évidence plusieurs grandes vérités, entre autres celle-ci: que notre bonheur consiste à vivre suivant la nature et la vertu." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 215.

best cultivated in society, rather than away from it. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre may thus be classified as a participant in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "autocritique of Enlightenment."[4]

Bernardin has long been associated with Rousseau. He had the opportunity to meet the well-known philosopher in the summer of 1771 after returning from a two-year post on the island *Ile-de-France* (present-day Mauritius and the same island where his novel takes place). Later he testified, "as soon as I met him, I loved him passionately."[5] During the next seven years before Rousseau's death, the two men became close friends. Bernardin visited him frequently in the winter months and they took walks together in the spring and summer. It is also during this period that Bernardin wrote the first draft of what would later become *Paul et Virginie*. Mutual friends spoke of their similarity, while even contemporary newspapers referenced Bernardin variously as a "friend and disciple" and "servile imitator" of Rousseau.[6]

Not surprisingly, then, *Paul et Virginie* is permeated with Rousseauian themes, particularly those of Rousseau's two *Discours* (1751 and 1755) and of *Émile* (1762). Both authors devote a significant portion of their oeuvre to carefully explaining the

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[4] Hulliung, *The Autocritique of Enlightenment*; Bernardi, *La Fabriques des concepts*, 543; Duflo, "Le hussard et l'inscription," 25-26; and Wiedemeier, *La Religion de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, 31. Hulliung's conception of Rousseau as a figure of Enlightenment autocritique (rather than anti-Enlightenment) has been embraced by other scholars such as Bernardi. Duflo applies this terminology to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, while Wiedemeier similarly classifies Rousseau and Bernardin in a "seconde voix des Lumières."

[5] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, "La Vie de J.-J. Rousseau," 23.

[6] Letter from Pierre-Louis Moline to the marquis de Valady, 21 May 1788: "Que M^{r} De S^{t} Pierre me paroit digne d'avoir été [l'ami] de J:J:! en lisant les etudes de la nature J'aurois deviné ces liaisons qui les honnorent l'un & l'autre quand même l'auteur ne me les eut pas apprises lui-même. Conformité de moeurs de principes & […] conformité de destinées." Rousseau, *Correspondance*, XLV, 399; Letter from Pierre Mouchon, 17 May 1789: "Je lui trouve [chez Bernardin] beaucoup de traits de conformité avec Jean-Jacques!" Rousseau, *Correspondance*, XLVI, 37; *Journal de la Ville*, Ed. Suard and Fontanes, 1 October 1789: "Il appartient sans doute à l'ami, au disciple de l'auteur du Contrat social, d'élever sa voix au milieux de cette memorable revolution, qui auroit étonné Rousseau lui-même." Cited in Rousseau, *Correspondance*, XLVI, 72; *Révolutions de Paris*, no.104, 2-9 July 1791, viii.642: "imitateur servile de J.J. Rousseau." Cited in Rousseau, *Correspondence*, XLVI, 339.

psychology of man in society who is corrupted and enslaved through his dealings with others and his attempts to satisfy artificial needs. They stand in contrast to other Enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire and Diderot, whose criticism of certain social prejudices never hinders their confidence that society and even mankind may be improved through philosophy and education. Bernardin's novel *Paul et Virginie* echoes Rousseau's critique of the philosophers by depicting society as a morally degenerative force that cannot be improved, only avoided. It likewise joins Rousseau in upholding a simple and modest life in harmony with nature: where men are equal, where natural goodness is allowed to flourish, and where the snares of society do not force man to renounce his conscience in order to survive.

CHRISTIANIZING ROUSSEAU…

While Rousseau's strong influence on Bernardin is undeniable, that influence alone cannot account for the decidedly religious flavor of Bernardin's novel. This paper proposes a reading of *Paul et Virginie* as a Christianization of Rousseau, in that Bernardin supplies explicit Christian motives for preferring the natural life, rather than accepting Rousseau's ideals of self-sufficiency and independence for the basis of his moral theory and preference of nature. According to *Paul et Virginie*, nature is to be preferred over society because it leads us to God and allows us to serve him more freely, without having to cater to society's (often immoral) demands. Bernardin is thus able to associate the natural life with a God-centered life, one in which dependence on God, virtue, and good works bring happiness.

I am certainly not the first to raise the issue of Christian influence in *Paul et Virginie*. Jean-Louis Vissière boldly opens an article with the words, "The evidence for

Bernardin's biblical inspiration is striking."[7] He first notes the Edenic setting, where Paul and Virginie grow up in perfect innocence and are explicitly likened to Adam and Eve:

> At the dawn of life, they had all of its freshness: it was in this way our original parents appeared in the garden of Eden, when, out of the hands of God, they approached each other and spoke first as brother and sister. Virginie, sweet, modest, confident like Eve; and Paul, like Adam, with the height of a man and the simplicity of a child.[8]

Vissière's article offers a close reading of a passage in *Paul et Virginie* where the idyllic natural setting turns ominous, echoing many of the natural conditions described in the apocalyptic book of Revelation. Vissière argues that Bernardin's use of biblical imagery reinforces the novel's portrayal of paradise's transformation into hell. Regrettably, he does not venture to expand on the implications of such a reading of the novel. Another attempt to invoke Bernardin's Christianity can be found in Angelica Goodden's article, which attributes Virginie's death to Bernardin's "Christian conception of virtue" that is "bound up with an ideal of chastity in woman."[9] This position, however, has been disputed: while modesty is certainly a Christian value, Philip Robinson argues that "natural modesty" is very much a part of Rousseau's vision. He also cites textual evidence to indicate Bernardin agreed that female modesty is a value inspired by natural goodness.[10] Another fascinating and better supported case for Christianity within *Paul et Virginie* is Philip Mestry's *Une Analyse des Macro-Structures de "Paul et Virginie"*, which argues that the novel serves as a biblical allegory, starting at Creation before the fall of man, continuing through the arrival of sin and its disastrous consequences, and

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[7] L'inspiration biblique de Bernardin est d'une evidence criante." Vissière, "Une Page Apocalyptique de *Paul et Virginie*," 36.

[8] "Au matin de la vie, ils en avaient toute la fraîcheur: tels dans le jardin d'Éden parurent nos premiers parents, lorsque, sortant des mains de Dieu, ils se virent, s'approchèrent, et conversèrent d'abord comme frère et comme soeur. Virginie, douce, modeste, confiante comme Ève; et Paul, semblable à Adam, ayant la taille d'un homme avec la simplicité d'un enfant." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 126.

[9] Goodden, "Tradition and Innovation in 'Paul et Virginie,'" 563.

[10] Robinson, "Virginie's fatal modesty," 38.

ending with the substitutionary death of an innocent person who redeems the world and becomes an example for others to live virtuously.[11] In this reading, Virginie represents Christ. While this proposal might resolve the question of the purpose behind Virginie's death, it is not clear why the others should have to die after her, or why the novel should be shrouded by an elegiac nostalgia for former times.

…À LA FÉNELON

In contrast to previous studies of Christian elements within *Paul et Virginie*, this paper seeks to expose the author's debt to one theologian in particular. While Chapter One demonstrates that Bernardin's philosophy falls short of reproducing Rousseau's arguments due to a certain Christian influence, it also raises the question of what Christian influence that could be, given that the novel also hints of unorthodox beliefs, such as the natural goodness of man and the sufficiency of natural revelation. Chapter Two thus begins by allowing Bernardin to answer for himself that he finds more affinity with the spirituality of the seventeenth-century quietist François de la Mothe de Fénelon (1651-1715), Archbishop of Cambrai, than any other Christian thinker. Chapter Two goes on to defend that numerous Fénelonian ideas indeed find expression in *Paul et Virginie*: ideas such as a conception of worship that privileges inner realities over external performances; a glorification of pure, disinterested love toward God; an ideal lifestyle of simplicity and harmony with nature; and an acknowledgement of the role of sentiment in gaining knowledge about God. Finally, Chapter Two also argues that yet another reason for Bernardin's unhindered admiration for Fénelon can be found in the fact that Fénelon's most well-known works do not emphasize the orthodox doctrines that

[11] Mestry, *Une Analyse des Macro-Structures de "Paul et Virginie"*, 72.

Bernardin denies, thereby allowing him to ignore or misinterpret Fénelon's beliefs to be wholly consistent with his own.

In all, this paper demonstrates Bernardin's novel to be a synthesis of the philosophies of Rousseau and Fénelon. The choice of these two men is not arbitrary but reflects instead Bernardin's own veneration for these two particular men, to whom he paid homage by carving their names – and their names only – on an urn, which came to be displayed at his office next to an inscription in their praise.[12] Despite this obvious show of admiration, Bernardin does not remain completely faithful to either Rousseau or Fénelon. *Paul et Virginie* certainly embraces Rousseauian themes, yet it remains more outwardly Christian than Rousseau by backing away from his ideals of self-sufficiency and independence. This is the subject of Chapter One. Likewise, Chapter Two explores not only the parallels between Fénelon's theology and that of *Paul et Virginie* but also addresses the question of how Fénelon could have been misunderstood in such a way as to make his theology, that of a devout Catholic archbishop, particularly attractive to those in the more secular eighteenth-century. In other words, this paper offers an explanation for how Bernardin – and others, such as Rousseau – could preserve such an admiration

[12] "Ayant trouvé, il y a quelque temps, sur la Pont-Neuf, une de ces petites urnes de trois ou quatre sous, que vendent les Italiens dans les rues, l'idée me vint d'en ériger dans ma solitude un monument à la mémoire de J.-J. et de Fénelon, à la manière de ceux que les Chinois élèvent à celle de Confucius. Comme il y a deux petits écussons sur cette urne, j'écrivis sur l'un ces mots, J.-J. ROUSSEAU; et sur l'autre, F. FÉNÉLON. Je la posai ensuite à six pieds de hauteur dans un angle de mon cabinet, et je plaçai auprès d'elle cette inscription.

A la gloire durable et pure
De ceux dont le genie éclaira les vertus,
Combattit à la fois l'erreur et les abus,
Et tenta d'amener leur siècle à la nature.
Aux Jean-Jacques Rousseaux, aux François Fénélons,
J'ai dédié ce monument d'argile,
Que j'ai consacré par leurs noms,
Plus augustes que ceux de César et d'Achille. […]" Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature*, 581-582.

for this Christian thinker while denying some of the most important fundamentals of the Christian faith.

Chapter One:
Rousseauian Claims, Christian Motivations

When Bernardin de Saint-Pierre writes that the goal of his novel *Paul et Virginie* is to demonstrate the truth that "our happiness consists in living according to nature and virtue,"[1] he appears very much to be making a Rousseauian claim. Like Rousseau, he places happiness and virtue within the domain of nature, not society. Nevertheless, this chapter seeks to distinguish Rousseau and Bernardin's similar-sounding claims by exposing the Christian motivation intrinsic to the philosophy of *Paul et Virginie*, which is not only absent from Rousseau but totally contrary to his primary doctrine of self-sufficiency. This investigation will reveal that Rousseau and Bernardin in fact offer very different perspectives on the true value of nature, the true source of happiness, and the true meaning of virtue. Whereas Rousseau links these concepts to independence and self-sufficiency, Bernardin manages to preserve a Christian motivation of dependence on and service to God. In short, where Rousseau's arguments are anthropocentric, Bernardin's are theocentric.

THE TRUE VALUE OF NATURE

While Rousseau and Bernardin agree about the corrosiveness of society, they have different reasons for preferring nature and solitude. For Rousseau, repudiating society is simply a matter of regaining one's freedom. As his *Du Contrat Social* (1762) boldly opens, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."[2] Removing those chains is about gaining the freedom to be one's authentic self, to no longer be enslaved

[1] "notre bonheur consiste à vivre suivant la nature et la vertu." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 215.
[2] "L'homme est né libre, et partout il est dans les fers." Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*, 46.

by the pressure to conform, to be at whole and at peace as a completely independent individual. In *Paul et Virginie*, however, nature is not simply the removal of a negative influence but the addition of a positive one. Nature is valued in that it leads toward God and invites man to know him, trust in him, and serve him by serving others. Thus independence from society is desired not for independence's sake, but for the sake of dependence on God.

Likewise, Bernardin's true critique of society is not that it takes freedom away altogether, but that it makes serving God more difficult. When Paul dreams of joining Virginie in France and winning her hand in marriage, the old man informs him that social success comes only at the price of resorting to vice and renouncing one's conscience. Rousseau too teaches that social man must renounce his conscience in order to succeed, however, in his view, the tragedy behind man's damaged conscience is his own loss of personal freedom and divided psychological self. In contrast, Bernardin locates the tragedy of man's damaged conscience in his failure to obey God. As the old man in the story informs Paul, "families, corporations, peoples, kings, all have their prejudices and their passions; it is often necessary to serve them with vice. God and mankind ask us only for virtue."[3] Paul therefore decides not to follow Virginie to Europe, where he would have to make a choice between success, pleasing the world, and virtue, pleasing God. Society is certainly disadvantageous, but it does not force anyone to make any particular choice: virtue is costly, but still possible. After all, Virginie is able to maintain her virtue while in France even though her priorities cost her the esteem of others. She laments that she has fewer opportunities to do good, but she does what she can and retains her thankfulness toward God. She stands in stark contrast to Sophie in *Émile et*

[3] "Les familles, les Corps, les peuples, les rois, ont leurs préjugés et leurs passions; il faut souvent les servir par des vices. Dieu et le genre humain ne nous demandent que des vertus." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 164.

Sophie, ou Les Solitaires, Rousseau's unfinished sequel to *Emile*. Despite her good upbringing, Sophie is led astray by the corruption of Paris and commits adultery. Whereas one could argue that Sophie loses her freedom in society, Virginie does not. She knows that serving God and serving humanity often means ignoring the particular interests of various social groups. The advantage of nature for Bernardin is thus not simply the ability to live independently from the corruptive force of society, but the ability to serve God more freely. Even if both Bernardin and Rousseau both portray living according to nature as living according to one's conscience, the distinction is important to make because it allows for Bernardin to make essentially the same claims as Rousseau, while giving them a Christian motivation.

Of course, Virginie's ability to maintain her virtue in society represents an extreme case, as she is perhaps an idealized example. Bernardin himself testified to Rousseau that, "If I had been rich, I would have been a hedonist," revealing his doubts concerning whether man really does have a choice about practicing virtue. Rousseau agreed, "So would I. Virtue depends on circumstances."[4] It is clear that both men view nature as the place where man can best cultivate virtue. As we will see, though, for Bernardin, nature has the added value of bringing man close to God in order to experience his goodness and learn to trust in him and to rely on him through times of trouble. These advantages of nature are absent from Rousseau's ideology, where self-reliance is supreme.

Throughout *Paul et Virginie*, nature is portrayed as the source of God's goodness and blessings. At the beginning of the novel, nature is the vehicle through which Madame de la Tour is comforted through her sorrow. However, it is not simply an

[4] "Sur ce que je lui disais que si j'avais été riche j'aurais été voluptueux, il me dit: 'Et moi aussi. La vertu depend des circonstances.'" Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, "La Vie de J.-J. Rousseau," 34.

impersonal "calm of nature" that aids her as she retreats to a secluded area. Rather, she finds a personal benefactor behind the forces of nature: "Providence, which comes to our rescue" provides her with exactly what she needs, that is, a friend.[5] Whereas she is drawn to nature, it is God, working through nature, that sends the help. The rest of the novel develops the children's close relationship to God, which is prompted by their life in harmony with nature. The children learn to pray with a loving heart wherever they are, be it in the house, in the fields, or in the forest.[6] As they see God at work to provide for their needs, they are inspired to worship him all the more. Even when they work to plant and harvest vegetables, they give God the credit for the miracle of growing food: "They admired with transport the power of a providence that, through their hands, had spread abundance and grace among these arid rocks."[7] Discussions of nature are inseparable from declarations of thanksgiving to God and scenes of worship. As the narrator explains, "For them, every day was a holy day, and everything around them was a divine temple, where they never ceased to admire an Intelligence that was infinite, all-powerful, and a friend of mankind."[8]

It is precisely because Bernardin's providence is not impersonal but personal – a "friend of mankind" – that Paul and Virginie need not exemplify Rousseau's ideal of self-sufficiency. They find satisfaction not in their own ability to provide for all their needs, but in their confidence in God's ability to provide. Whenever they find themselves in need, they are quick to pray and trust God, and the response is always immediate. For

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[5] "comme si le calme de la nature pouvait apaiser les troubles malheureux de l'âme. Mais la Providence, qui vient à notre secours lorsque nous ne voulons que les biens nécessaires, en réservait un à madame de la Tour […]; c'était une amie." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 92.

[6] "partout où ils étaient, dans la maison, dans les champs, dans les bois, ils levaient vers le ciel des mains innocentes et un coeur plein de l'amour de leurs parents." Ibid., 99.

[7] "[Les familles] admiraient avec transport le pouvoir d'une providence qui par leurs mains avaient répandu au milieu de ces arides roches l'abondance, les grâces." Ibid., 112.

[8] "Chaque jour était pour eux un jour de fête, et tout ce qui les environnait un temple divin, où ils admiraient sans cesse une Intelligence infini, toute-puissante, et amie des hommes." Ibid., 120.

example, when they are lost in the woods, far from home, hungry and thirsty, Virginie trusts that "God will have pity on us. He hears even the voices of the little birds who ask him for food."[9] The text reads that "she had hardly said these words" before they hear the sound of a spring which leads them both to water and to edible fruits.[10] The scene is repeated a few pages later, when, after much hiking, the sun is setting just as Virginie collapses, unable to walk another step. Despite these troubles, deliverance is only a prayer away: "no sooner had they finished their prayer that they heard a dog barking."[11] The dog is their own, closely followed by their servant Domingue bringing food and drinks. If this were not enough of a miracle, a troop of black natives immediately appears, offering to carry Paul and Virginie back home on their shoulders, as a grateful reward for a favor which the children previously did for them. Through every danger, they feel the hand of God guiding them, and "this trust in the supreme power filled them with consolation for the past, courage for the present, and hope for the future."[12] It is Virginie's trust in God's provisions which allows her to face an uncertain future with confidence as she resolves not to leave the place of God's blessing, even at the prospect of gaining earthly riches: "Until now [God] has never forsaken us, and he will never forsake us in the future. His providence especially watches over the unfortunate. […] I cannot resolve myself to leave you!"[13] These situations demonstrate the extent to which *Paul et Virginie* teaches that the joy and happiness found in nature is that of being close to God and being able to rely on his provisions.

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[9] "Dieu aura pitié de nous, reprit Virginie; il exauce la voix des petits oiseaux qui lui demandent de la nourriture." Ibid., 105.

[10] "A peine avait-elle dit ces mots qu'ils entendirent le bruit d'une source qui tombait d'un rocher voisin." Ibid.

[11] "A peine avaient-ils achevé leur prière qu'ils entendirent un chien aboyer." Ibid., 109.

[12] "ce sentiment de confiance dans le pouvoir suprême les remplissait de consolation pour le passé, de courage pour le présent, et d'espérance pour l'avenir." Ibid., 120.

[13] "Jusqu'à present il ne nous a pas abandonees, il ne nous abandonnera point encore. Sa providence veille particulièrement sur les malheureux. […] Je ne saurais me résoudre à vous quitter." Ibid., 137.

While the proposal that nature shows evidence of a Creator was nothing new to eighteenth-century readers, the idea that this same Creator could also be called a "friend of mankind" was unique to Christianity. Voltaire and many other philosophers present arguments for Deism; that is, they accept the existence of a deity who set the world in motion but who no longer interferes in the daily lives of men. While Rousseau admittedly identifies himself as a Christian, he never emphasizes living dependently on God in the manner of Paul and Virginie. In fact, his Savoyard Vicar outlines a Deist form of worship, which he presumes is a form of worship "dictated by nature itself," even though it is far from replicating Paul and Virginie's innocent relationship with God that is likewise prompted by nature.[14] Rather than viewing the Creator as the omnipotent "friend of mankind" who is always ready to answer prayers, the Savoyard Vicar argues that it would only be arrogant to ask God for more than he has already given. Thus he preserves – through the backdoor, perhaps – a place for Rousseau's ideal of self-sufficiency. "I am moved at [God's] kindnesses, I praise him for his gifts," says the Savoyard Vicar, "but I do not pray to him."[15] It should be noted that the "kindnesses" and "gifts" of God remain limited to his creative acts – God no longer intervenes in his "established order," and any prayer that asks him to do so, simply for the benefit of one man, "would deserve to be punished instead of granted."[16] The Vicar thus looks with contempt on the idea that we need any help from God beyond what we have already been given, that is, our lives, and our freedom to choose good instead of evil. Such a mindset reflects what Charles Taylor calls the "eclipse of grace," one of four anthropocentric shifts that brought about a culture of Deism in the late seventeenth and eighteenth

[14] "Je n'ai pas besoin qu'on m'enseigne ce culte, il m'est dicté par la nature elle-même." Rousseau, *Émile*, 361.
[15] "je m'attendris à ses bienfaits, je le bénis de ses dons; mais je ne le prie pas." Rousseau, *Émile*, 382.
[16] "mériterait d'être plutôt puni qu'exaucé." Rousseau, *Émile*, 382.

centuries.[17] The Savoyard Vicar does not ask God for the power to do good, nor does he ask God to change his will; even those prayers he would consider 'cheating', or, in his words, "asking [God] to do what he asks me to do, […] wanting him to do my work while I receive the earnings."[18] To speak of the religious life in terms of work and earnings is consistent with the rejection of grace. In order to accept grace – that is, the unmerited favor of God – Rousseau would be required to give up his self-sufficiency and learn how to be indebted to another, which he is quite loathe to do.

The God that Rousseau sees revealed through nature thus differs in several important ways from that of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Contrary to Bernardin, Rousseau does not hold Providence to be either completely personal or completely beneficent. Bernardin writes that Rousseau believed in "a destiny that persecuted him."[19] Rousseau's lament over an unfair destiny can also be found in his *Confessions* (completed 1769, published 1782). At the end of Book I, he pauses "before giving in to the fate of [his] destiny," and allows himself to wonder what the "natural" course of his life would have been if only he had apprenticed with a better master.[20] He writes at length about what could and would have awaited him if fate had been kinder: "I would have been a good Christian, a good citizen, a good father, a good friend, a good worker, a good man in everything."[21] Clearly, Rousseau feels cheated, and the God that he recognizes as evident through nature is certainly not worthy of the trust that Paul and Virginie show in theirs. Later, in Book II, he again invokes "his star" and "the destiny that awaited me" in a

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[17] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 222.
[18] "c'est lui demander ce qu'il me demande; c'est vouloir qu'il fasse mon oeuvre et que j'en recueille le salaire." Rousseau, *Émile*, 383.
[19] "Il croyait à une destinée qui le persécutait." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, "La Vie de J.-J. Rousseau," 33.
[20] "Avant de m'abandonner à la fatalité de ma destinée, qu'on me permette de tourner un moment les yeux sur celle qui m'attendait naturellement si j'étais tombé dans les mains d'un meilleur maître." Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, 73.
[21] "J'aurais été bon chrétien, bon citoyen, bon père de famille, bon ami, bon ouvrier, bon homme en toute chose." Ibid., 74.

dramatic show of self-pity.[22] By choosing words such as "destiny" and "star" over divinely-appointed "providence," he shows his refusal to accept the active involvement of a benevolent God in his life, the way that Virginie does in hers. Christian Thorne notes the eighteenth-century narrative's transition away from the notion of divine "providence" in favor of the random destructive forces of "fortune." "Providence has to leave the scene," he writes, "before fortune can step to the fore as a narrative mode."[23] In Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel, however, providence is alive and well. Rousseau, on the other hand, finds himself unable to account for the small misfortunes of life, and confesses, "providence only takes care of species, not individuals" – hence the need to rely on oneself rather than on a divine benefactor.[24]

THE TRUE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

For Rousseau, not only the value of nature, but also the source of happiness, is linked to self-sufficiency. After all, if Rousseau values nature in that nature allows him to live an independent life, it follows that he must value living an independent life for another reason. In fact, *Émile* repeatedly argues for self-sufficiency as the highest good and the true source of happiness. In contrast, as we will see, not only does Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie* not share the priority of self-sufficiency, but it also condemns the selfishness of such an attitude and instead endorses selfless service in obedience to God as the true route to happiness.

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[22] "Il semblait que mes proches conspirassent avec mon étoile pour me livrer au destin qui m'attendait." Ibid., 96.
[23] Thorne, *The Dialectic of Counter-Enlightenment*, 268.
[24] "La providence n'a soin que des espèces, et non des individus." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, "La Vie de J.-J. Rousseau," 33.

In *Émile*, Rousseau argues that the most successful education – one that best equips a child "to bear the goods and ills of this life"[25] – is one that ensures the child is dependent on no one. Émile's tutor serves as a guide who does not inculcate him with "lessons" but allows him to learn through his own experiences and depend on himself so that "once made a man, he will have need for no other guide but himself."[26] Self-reliance is essential, since, according to Rousseau, it is dependence on others that makes us "weak and miserable."[27] Accordingly, the tutor teaches Émile to despise the help of others. Even at an early age when he is completely dependent on caregivers, he is to be made to receive help only grudgingly and with humiliation, so that "he aspires to the time when he can do without [their help], and when he will have the honor of serving himself."[28] The lesson to provide for one's own needs is taught in miniscule ways even from the time of Émile's infancy. The tutor is careful never to give him anything that he asks for unless he has true need of it, so that he learns not to take advantage of the gifts of others by being manipulative.[29] Indeed, Rousseau warns that the very act of rendering service to Émile beyond what is necessary will surely teach him to dominate others.[30] Émile has no capacity either to give or to receive in grace.

In order to be truly self-sufficient, Émile must not only reject dependence on others but train up his ability to provide for himself. For Rousseau, this ability requires

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[25] "Celui d'entre nous qui sait le mieux supporter les biens et les maux de cette vie est à mon gré le mieux élevé." Rousseau, *Émile*, 42.

[26] "Ne donnez à votre élève aucune espèce de leçon veritable; il n'en doit recevoir que de l'expérience." Ibid., 110; "devenu homme fait, il n'aura plus besoin d'autre guide que lui-même." Ibid., 54.

[27] "Chacun de nous, ne pouvant plus se passer des autres, redevient à cet égard faible et misérable." Ibid., 100.

[28] "en recevant vos services avec une sorte d'humiliation, il aspire au moment où il pourra s'en passer, et où il aura l'honneur de se servir lui-même." Ibid., 101.

[29] "n'accordez rien à ses désirs parce qu'il le demande, mais parce qu'il en a besoin." Ibid.

[30] "ainsi de leur propre faiblesse, d'où vient d'abord le sentiment de leur dépendance, naît ensuite l'idée de l'empire et de la domination; mais cette idée étant moins excitée par leurs besoins que par nos services[...]." Ibid., 76.

foremost a body that is physically strong, because one can be dependent on one's physical desires in the same way one can be dependent on other people, and both are equally enslaving. The body must serve the will, not the other way around.[31] Therefore, the tutor is to habituate Émile to physical suffering of all types until his body is strong and able to endure all things.[32] The tutor also habituates him to scary, ugly, and strange objects so that he learns not to respond to his surroundings in fear.[33]

One of the most radical of Rousseau's claims is that the result of cultivating this self-sufficiency, or the ability to accomplish all that one desires, is a life of both goodness and happiness. He argues that unhappiness is derived from the inequality between our desires and our ability to accomplish our desires. In other words, we are unhappy when we want something that we cannot provide for ourselves. The "route of true happiness" is "equalizing power [*pouvoir*] and will [*vouloir*]."[34] This is a process that includes both rejecting those desires that are artificially created through interaction in society – which can grow to an infinite number – as well as maintaining one's ability to fulfill the few desires that are natural. It is for this reason that it is essential that children be trained up physically. Rousseau argues that a child's fundamental problem is not a moral one but a physical one. Children do not understand right and wrong before the age of reason, and so any misbehavior is simply an attempt to compensate for their weakness, a problem which will be solved when they become strong: "All viciousness comes from weakness.

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[31] "Il faut que le corps ait de la vigeur pour obéir à l'âme: un bon serviteur doit être robuste. […] Plus le corps est fabile, plus il commande; plus il est fort, il obéit." Ibid., 58.

[32] "endurcissez leurs corps aux intempéries des saisons, des climates, des éléments, à la faim, à la soif, à la fatigue." Ibid., 49.

[33] Ibid., 71-72.

[34] "En quoi consiste […] la route du vrai bonheur? […] c'est à diminuer l'excès des désirs sur les facultées, et à mettre en égalité parfaite la puissance et la volonté." Ibid., 94.

The child is only mean because he is weak; make him strong, and he will be good."[35] Liberty and happiness are the result of finally wanting no more than one can accomplish.[36] Rousseau insists that any man who, free from society's artificial desires, simply desires to live, "will be happy, and therefore will be good. For what advantage would he have to be mean?"[37] Goodness is thus the result, not the cause, of happiness. Whereas Rousseau's Savoyard Vicar reverses this logic as he exclaims, "first let us be good, and then we will be happy,"[38] Rousseau's own reasoning is clear: man is happy when his few needs are satisfied, and only afterward is he free to be good. This type of goodness is hardly morally admirable, however. Just as Rousseau challenges man's moral accountability in arguing that man's vices are forced upon him through society's corruptive force, so the goodness that he describes is not an active choice to reject evil and cling to good, but merely the removal of all incentive for wrongdoing.

Actually, there is one choice that man does have to make: that of seeking out the place where he can be self-sufficient, happy, and good. Hence the real value of solitude is not to help man look to God but to allow him to look exclusively to himself and provide for his own happiness through meeting all his needs. Whereas love of self [*amour de soi*] is satisfied when our needs are met, the *amour-propre* that is born in society is never satisfied, as it constantly compares oneself to others and demands that others prefer us over themselves.[39] The only solution to this miserable state of

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[35] "toute méchanceté vient de faiblesse; l'enfant n'est méchant que parce qu'il est faible; rendez-le fort, il sera bon." Ibid., 76-77; "Avant l'âge de raison, nous faisons le bien et le mal sans le connaître; et il n'y a point de moralité dans nos actions." Ibid., 77.

[36] "l'homme vraiment libre ne veut que ce qu'il peut." Ibid., 99.

[37] "tout homme qui ne voudrait que vivre, vivrait heureux; par conséquent il vivrait bon; car où serait pour lui l'avantage d'être méchant?" Ibid., 95.

[38] "soyons bons premièrement, et puis nous serons heureux." Ibid., 367.

[39] "L'amour de soi, qui ne regarde qu'à nous, est content quand nos vrais besoins sont satisfaits; mais l'amour-propre, qui se compare, n'est jamais content et ne saurait l'être, parce que ce sentiment, en nous préférant aux autres, exige aussi que les autres nous préfèrent à eux; ce qui est impossible." Ibid., 276-277.

dissatisfaction is to flee all social situations in order to ensure that man "has few needs and little to compare with others," which is Rousseau's magic solution to making man "essentially good."[40] Since man has no power over anything but himself, Rousseau invites him to "draw his existence inside himself" in order to guarantee his liberty and happiness.[41]

The route to happiness according to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie* is quite a bit different. In the first place, as we have seen, Paul and Virginie enjoy a certain confidence, hope, and joy through their relationship with God and trust in his provisions. Yet, the novel provides another explanation for their happiness, one tied to their obedience to the God-given charge to serve others. Paul and Virginie find their happiness not simply in living their solitary lives while trusting God to provide for them, but through an active engagement in doing good works for others. The commitment to serve others selflessly out of reverence and gratitude to God is called "virtue" in the novel and presented as the cause, not the result, of true happiness.

Virtue is equated with happiness from the very beginning of the novel, where the daughter of Madame de la Tour is named Virginie as if to bestow upon her a life of contentment. Marguerite attests that "She will be virtuous, and she will be happy. I've only known unhappiness by straying from virtue."[42] As Virginie grows, she demonstrates her virtue through a heart that longs to serve others. She becomes the image of Christian service and compassion as she finds joy in helping others, even at

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[40] "Ainsi, ce qui rend l'homme essentiellement bon est d'avoir peu de besoins, et de peu se comparer aux autres;" Ibid., 277.

[41] "o homme! resserre ton existence au dedans de toi, et tu ne seras plus misérable. ta liberté, ton pouvoir, ne s'étendent qu'aussi loin que tes forces naturelles, et pas au-delà." Ibid., 98.

[42] "Elle sera vertueuse, dit-elle, et elle sera heureuse. Je n'ai connu le Malheur qu'en m'écartant de la vertu." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 95.

great personal expense. For example, when she meets a poor runaway slave, she not only gives up her lunch to feed the girl, but also takes the initiative to traverse the island and beg the slave owner to forgive the girl and stop mistreating her. As Paul and Virginie try to find their way back home, they battle hunger, thirst, and exhaustion, yet can testify to being "filled with joy by the memory of the good deed they did that morning."[43] The families frequently spend their Sunday afternoons helping the townspeople by giving counsel or visiting the sick with medicines and comforting them by talking about God. Again, Virginie always returns home with "a heart full of joy, because she had the opportunity to do good."[44]

Virginie's zeal to accomplish good works guides her even to pray for such opportunities, since she knows that they are privileges given by the grace of God and cannot be taken for granted.[45] Virginie's stay in France only further reinforces this lesson. Despite the luxurious lifestyle she receives at her great aunt's estate, she finds herself unhappy, since, as she writes, "I have nothing to give."[46] The effort and commitment required to do good is evident not only through Virginie's prayer for opportunities but also through the children's need to "train themselves in good works"[47] and though Virginie's admission of the difficulty of the task: "My God! It's so difficult to do good! Only evil is easy to do," she exclaims repeatedly.[48] Despite the difficulties, though, she is convinced that "one can only make one's happiness by attending to that of

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[43] "remplis de joie par le souvenir de la bonne action qu'ils avaient faite le matin." Ibid., 106.
[44] "le coeur rempli de joie, car elle avait eu l'occasion de faire du bien." Ibid., 121.
[45] Ibid., 119.
[46] "je n'ai rien à donner." Ibid., 152.
[47] "en vous exerçant aux bienfaits." Ibid., 118.
[48] "Mon Dieu! qu'il est difficile de faire le bien! il n'y a que le mal de facile à faire." Ibid., 107; "Oh qu'il est difficile de faire le bien!" Ibid., 110.

others,"[49] and she alone succeeds by living a life of virtue. That is, she "always directed even the most ordinary of her actions to the good of others."[50]

Even if Paul and Virginie, at least to some extent, share Rousseau's misgivings about socializing with others, their desire for seclusion is motivated entirely differently from his, and, as a result, should not be seen as contradictory to their desire to serve. It is true that, while Paul and Virginie enjoy an intimate fellowship in their family life, they are careful not to associate too closely with either the rich or the poor of the island, each of whom harbors ulterior motives for desiring their company.[51] However, even if the children and their mothers live in seclusion, it is not for the purpose of living independently from others, as it is for Rousseau. Instead, their aim is to avoid getting involved in disputes or being distracted by judging others, which would compromise their ability to serve their community – a goal that Rousseau did not share. Living in solitude is precisely what allows them to maintain "a perpetual desire to do good which filled them with a readiness to extend goodwill [*bienveillance*] to all," which makes them "more human."[52] Rousseau would agree that solitude makes us more human, but not necessarily that being human involves constantly seeking opportunities to do good for others.

As a matter of fact, Rousseau even sees friendship as dangerous, since our thirst to be loved quickly becomes a desperate attempt to make ourselves worthy of the attention of others, which produces rivalry and jealousy. He writes, "along with love and friendship are born dissentions, hostility, and hatred."[53] Whereas Bernardin presents the

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[49] "On ne fait son bonheur, disait-elle, qu'en s'occupant de celui des autres." Ibid., 125.
[50] "Virginie dirigeait toujours au bien d'autrui ses actions même les plus communes." Ibid., 160.
[51] Ibid., 120-121.
[52] "elles en avait une volonté perpétuelle [de faire du bien] qui les remplissait d'une bienveillance toujours prête à s'étendre au-dehors. En vivant donc dans la solitude, […] [les familles] étaient devenues plus huamines." Ibid., 112.
[53] "Avec l'amour et l'amitié naissent les dissensions, l'inimitié, la haine." Rousseau, *Émile*, 278.

friendship of Madame de la Tour and Marguerite as a "necessary need"[54] and a gracious gift of Providence, Rousseau harshly blames man's sociability on his weakness: "All attachment is a sign of insufficiency […]. A truly happy being is a solitary one."[55] Rousseau may have allowed for a happy "golden age" of early human society, but the happiness of that age is not derived on what each individual can give the others, as is Virginie's, but on what they can get.[56] Happiness in his system requires attention to one's self, not the attention to others that is emphasized in *Paul et Virginie*.

THE TRUE MEANING OF VIRTUE

In contrast to the prevalent Enlightenment notion that one serves others best by serving oneself (since self-interest leads people in society to engage in mutually beneficial exchanges), *Paul et Virginie* presents a Christian, even Augustinian, view of virtue.[57] Acts of service are motivated by and directed to God, rather than to oneself or even to the person being served. When Virginie secretly donates her clothing to a poor family, she does so "according to the divine example: hiding the doer, showing the deed."[58] Her inspiration is none other than Jesus Christ, whose Sermon on the Mount warns, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them," and goes on to recommend giving in secret in order to receive heavenly reward.[59] The old man agrees that good works are ultimately offerings to God rather than to others. He

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[54] "bien nécessaire" Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 92.
[55] "C'est la faiblesse de l'homme qui le rend sociable […]. Un être vraiment heureux est un être solitaire." Rousseau, *Émile*, 286-287.
[56] Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, 226-229.
[57] "Augustine's accusation is that pagans [in their 'virtue'] not only fail to pursue God as their true final end but in fact order all things to self." Herdt, *Putting On Virtue*, 2.
[58] "Ainsi elle faisait le bien, à l'exemple de la Divinité, cachant la bienfaitrice, et montrant le bienfait." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 125.
[59] Matt. 6:1 (NASB)

defines virtue as "an effort made on ourselves for the good of others with the intention of pleasing God alone."[60] The word "effort" is not misplaced: in the *Études*, Bernardin explains that "to be virtuous it is necessary to resist one's own penchants, inclinations, tastes, and battle continually against oneself."[61] Madame de la Tour also presents virtue as the choice to accomplish that which God asks of us, whether or not we please to do so. She counsels her daughter to "address yourself to God […]. He is testing you today to reward you tomorrow. Remember that we are only on the earth to exercise virtue."[62] While the choice to please God often requires sacrifices, the rewards that he offers to his servants are abundant. These rewards are not the motivation for service, but they give further cause to delight in God and trust in his goodness. For instance, Virginie does not seek any reward when she returns the slave girl to her master. However, when she herself is rescued out of trouble by a group of people thankful for her good deed, she marvels at how good is always rewarded: "Never does God leave a good deed without its recompense."[63] At the end of the novel, Virginie holds fast to her virtue even at the cost of her own life, yet not grudgingly, but with a "serene face" and a "courage greater than the danger."[64] Though Paul and the old man are able to testify that "even in the terrible moment when we saw her perish, she was still happy,"[65] they fail to follow her selfless example, and consequently fail to achieve the happiness she enjoyed.

Whereas it is clear that *Paul et Virginie* allows for a Christian view of virtue as selfless, sacrificial service directed to and rewarded by God, Rousseau's moral theory has

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[60] "La vertu est un effort fait sur nous-mêmes pour le bien d'autrui dans l'intention de plaire à Dieu seul." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 171.

[61] "pour être vertueux il faut résister à ses penchants, à ses inclinations, à ses goûts, et combattre sans cesse contre soi-même." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature*, 562.

[62] "adresse-toi à Dieu […]. Il t'éprouve aujourd'hui pour te récompenser demain. Songe que nous ne sommes sur la terre que pour exercer la vertu." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 130.

[63] "jamais Dieu ne laisse un bienfait sans récompense." Ibid., 111.

[64] "un courage supérieur au danger … un visage serein." Ibid., 194.

[65] "même dans le moment terrible où nous l'avons vue périr elle était encore heureuse." Ibid., 193.

nothing whatsoever to do with Christianity. He is not concerned with striving for virtue, but for sincerity and autonomy, qualities that foster man's natural goodness by limiting his participation in the corrupt society around him. Young Émile is taught to resemble natural man in his orientation toward himself and to find the most happiness when meeting his own needs and doing the least harm to others. "Do no harm" is his most important lesson of morality.[66] As he grows, he eventually learns to be compassionate on the basis of pitying those who are less favorable than he is. Still, his compassion and service are not presented as virtues, but as "selfish passions" used to reinforce Émile's contentment in his feeling of superiority. Allan Bloom summarizes, "the motive and intention of Rousseauan compassion give it little in common with Christian compassion."[67] Émile may grow into a confident man whose vices have been sanitized away and who is perfectly willing to help others in need, but he is still a far cry from embracing Bernardin's Augustinian virtue as a gracious, selfless man whose goodwill blesses all those around him.

A CHRISTIAN NOVEL?

In light of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's theocentric and Rousseau's anthropocentric perspectives on nature, happiness, and virtue, Bernardin's belief that "our happiness consists in living according to nature and virtue" appears less Rousseauian than it did at first. As a friend of Rousseau, Bernardin understood firsthand that freedom in Rousseau's philosophy was paramount. He writes:

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[66] "La seule leçon de morale qui convienne à l'enfance, et la plus importante à tout âge, est de ne jamais faire de mal à personne." Rousseau, *Émile*, 128.
[67] Bloom, "Introduction," 18.

> [Rousseau] reduced his philosophy to three things which made man happy: health, freedom, and good conscience. As the two other things depend to some degree on freedom, he sacrificed everything to it; he was even on guard against friendship.[68]

It is only via an allegiance to self-sufficiency that Rousseau arrives at a love of nature, solitude, and virtue. In Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie*, by contrast, these ideals are motivated by love toward God.

This difference between the two thinkers is even applicable in matters of religion. Rousseau's ideal of self-sufficiency guides him to categorically reject any system of belief based on the testimony of other men. In fact, his insistence on the right of every person to freely choose what to believe serves as justification for why Émile is not to be taught about God during his childhood. Rousseau considers it outright immoral to speak to children about religion before the age of reason, which he marks as beginning at age fifteen. Before that time, children cannot judge what they are told by others and can only be brainwashed, for "when a child says he believes in God, it isn't really God he believes in, but Pierre or Jacques who tell him that there is something called God."[69] Paul and Virginie's experience is vastly different from Émile's as they are taught from the cradle to trust God and serve others selflessly. Furthermore, where Rousseau distrusts the Bible because it was written by men, Paul and Virginie enjoy reading from it and acting out its stories.[70] While their theology, like Rousseau's, is mostly derived from feelings and nature rather than from a careful study of the Bible, there is no indication that they consider the Bible to be untrustworthy simply because it is the work of men.[71]

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[68] "Il avait réduit sa philosophie aux trois choises qui rendent l'homme heureux: santé, liberté, bonne conscience; comme les deux autres dépendent en partie de la liberté, il lui sacrifiait tout; il ´tait en garde contre l'amitié même." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, "La Vie de J.-J. Rousseau," 35.

[69] "Quand un enfant dit qu'il croit en Dieu, ce n'est pas en Dieu qu'il croit, c'est à Pierre ou à Jacques qui lui disent qu'il y a quelque chose qu'on appelle Dieu." Rousseau, *Émile*, 336.

[70] Rousseau, *Émile*, 387-388; Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 119-120, 123.

[71] More on Bernardin's theology and beliefs about the Bible can be found in the final section of Chapter Two.

Is it possible to consider *Paul et Virginie* a Christian novel, then? While it might be acceptable to call it a Christianized take on Rousseau, in that it provides Christian motivations to support the Rousseauian charge to pursue nature and virtue, the novel is far from representing orthodox Christianity. For one thing, Bernardin's insistence on the natural goodness of man stands in direct opposition to the Christian doctrine of original sin, whereby humans are corrupt from birth and it is indeed sin, not goodness, which is in our nature. Bernardin makes his beliefs quite explicit in another work, where he writes:

> I believe man to be naturally good and that all of his vices without exception are the fruits of his education. By education I mean maltreatment, prejudice, the malignance of others, indigence, or anything that spoils man from childhood to the grave.[72]

Paul and Virginie's childhood innocence demonstrates above all Bernardin's belief in the power of a perfect environment to preserve mankind's uncorrupted state. Like Rousseau, Bernardin posits that man's fundamental problem is not that of his sinful nature, as Christianity teaches, but that of his environment. Rousseau opens *Émile* with a very similar argument:

> Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things, everything degenerates in the hands of man. […] Prejudice, authority, necessity, example, all the social institutions in which we find ourselves submerged, stifle nature out of [us], and leave nothing in its place.[73]

Bernardin and Rousseau's belief in the natural goodness of man also calls into question the need for a Redeemer. Indeed, as it might be expected, to the extent that Jesus Christ

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[72] "Je crois […] l'homme naturellement bon et que tous ses vices sans en excepter aucun sont des fruits de son étuducation. J'entends par éducation le mauvais traitement, les préjugés, la malignité d'autrui, l'indigence, enfin tout ce qui altère l'homme depuis l'enfance jusqu'au tombeau." Cited in Wiedemeier, *La Religion de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, 132.

[73] "Tout est bien sortant des mains de l'Auteur des choses, tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme. […] Les préjugés, l'autorité, la nécessité, l'exemple, toutes les institutions sociales, dans lesquelles nous nous trouvons submergés, étoufferaient en lui la nature, et ne mettraient rien à la place." Rousseau, *Emile*, 35.

appears in *Paul et Virginie*, his role is only that of an inspiration to Virginie, the perfect example of self-sacrifice for the needs of others.

Also problematic is the novel's downplay of Scripture and of the need for faith in particular aspects of doctrine. *Paul et Virginie* clearly sympathizes with natural religion and places more importance on works than beliefs. Christianity as a religious system is even criticized within the novel, in that the Church remains plagued by social ills.[74] Even more significant is the often-overlooked fact that the very downfall of the protagonists can be traced to one clergyman who falsely convinces Virginie that her trip to France is commanded by God.[75] The novel certainly does not appear to have anything favorable to say about organized religion as a social institution.

Such difficulties in reconciling the novel with Christian orthodoxy should remind the reader that even while Bernardin appears to superimpose Christian ideals and motivations onto a Rousseauian philosophical framework, he also retains a certain allegiance to the secularist trends of his century. The question remains: if Bernardin is to reject original sin, ignore Christ's redemptive work on the cross, limit the usefulness of the Scriptures, and criticize the leadership of the Christian church, what sort of Christianity can he possibly advocate? Where does his Christian influence come from, and how can he continue to defend it while denying many of Christianity's fundamental beliefs?

The following chapter seeks to answer these questions in light of Bernardin's admiration for the seventeenth century quietist theologian François Fénelon.

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[74] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 120.
[75] Ibid., 138.

Chapter Two:
Using and Abusing the Theology of François Fénelon

The task of identifying Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's most important Christian influence is not a difficult one, given the frequency with which his writings reference the name of François Fénelon, Archbishop of Cambrai and the author of "the most read literary work in eighteenth-century France (after the Bible)": *Les aventures de Télémaque, fils d'Ulysse* (1699).[1] In fact, *Télémaque* and the Bible are the only two literary works to appear in Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie* by name.

In Bernardin's *Études de la nature*, Fénelon and his works are referenced twenty-four times, often with glowing praises and epithets, such as "good Fénelon," "divine Fénelon," "divine author of *Télémaque*," and "divine *Télémaque*."[2] In a hypothetical setting of the Elysian Fields where the honored dead are memorialized, Bernardin imagines that we would come to a statue of Fénelon and exclaim, "And you, divine author of *Télémaque*, who gave both the precept and the example of virtue! we would revere your ashes and your image."[3] This is not the only instance where Bernardin associates Fénelon with virtue, recalling how his novel likewise praises Virginie by presenting her too as a model of virtue. Bernardin argues that it was virtue that sustained Fénelon and those like him throughout all walks of life, and it was virtue that secured his fame.[4] Similarly, it is his virtue that "adds a certain degree of authority to his arguments" for the existence of God, while his works of fiction prove him to be the prime example of one who understood that "the liberal arts are intended for no other reason than to evoke

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[1] Riley, "Introduction," xvi.
[2] "bon Fénelon." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature*, 472; "divin Fénelon." Ibid., 266; "divin auteur du Télémaque." Ibid., 541; "divin Télémaque." Ibid., 472.
[3] "Et vous, qui avez donné à la fois le précepte et l'exemple de la vertu, divin auteur du Télémaque! nous révérerions vos cendres et votre image." Ibid., 541.
[4] Ibid., 79, 562.

virtue."[5] As we will see, Bernardin's definition of virtue strongly correlates with Fénelon's definition of *pur amour*, or true love. For both men, this is a concept that lies at the heart of man's very purpose for existence.

When Bernardin lists the authors throughout history whose works have universal appeal, he cites only four classical authors and Fénelon, giving credit to a certain "instinct of the Divine" found within their works, which "makes the action of Providence manifest to us."[6] It is this desire to interpret events with reference to a God who is presently active in the world that distinguishes Bernardin's position from the Deism of Rousseau, as discussed in the previous chapter. There is no doubt that Bernardin is a theist; the God that he worships as Creator is still very active in man's day to day affairs, ready to answer prayers and bestow blessings on those who seek him. Yet, it is not at all apparent to which branch of Christianity Bernardin most adheres. His views on original sin, the role of Jesus Christ, and the importance of the Scriptures are all non-orthodox. In addition, like so many others of his day, including Rousseau, Bernardin is sympathetic toward natural religion, often seeming to equate religion with morality. Still, if there is one variety of Christianity that he finds attractive, it is the quietism of François Fénelon, for reasons that this chapter will attempt to elucidate.

This chapter addresses both the how and the why behind Bernardin's admiration for Fénelon. The first two sections explore aspects of Fénelon's teachings that find expression in *Paul et Virginie*: the idea that true worship takes place in the heart and is motivated by love rather than fear, and that the pinnacle of this love for God, *pur amour*, is a selfless renunciation of one's self and one's desires in favor of accomplishing the will

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[5] "Je ne dis pas cependant que sa vertu n'ajoute quelque degré d'autorité à ses preuves." Ibid., 244; "les arts libéraux ne sont destinés qu'à rappeler le souvenir de la vertu." Ibid., 534.

[6] "Cet instinct de la Divinité." "ceux qui nous rendent l'action de la Providence toujours présente." Ibid., 485.

of God. The authors' similar language demonstrates, if not Bernardin's direct borrowing from Fénelon, at least a motivation for his affinity and preference for Fénelon over other religious figures. The final two sections of this chapter explore the implications of the fact that, of the two of Fénelon's works that Bernardin most frequently cites, *Télémaque* and the *Traité de l'existence de Dieu* (published in 1712 with a second part added in 1718), neither is a primarily a work of theology; neither even mentions the orthodox doctrines Bernardin denies. While their subject matters evoke similarities to Bernardin's thought – for instance, the ideals of simplicity and virtue, and the desire to recognize God's presence in nature – their silence on particular doctrines like original sin and the authority of the Scriptures also allows Bernardin to preserve his beliefs about natural goodness and the sufficiency of natural revelation. Thus, if Bernardin was to synthesize his Rousseauian doctrine with any brand of Christianity, Fénelon was the ideal figure – inspirational but non-threatening – to allow him to do so, by virtue of both what he emphasized and also what he failed to emphasize.

DEVOUT HUMANISM

Fourteen years after Bernardin's death, his pupil and friend, Louis Aimé-Martin, wrote that Bernardin had learned certain things about religion from "his master," Fénelon: that "religion is motivated by the goodness of God, it is found in the human heart, and it is born from gratitude."[7] These characteristics recall Fénelon's position in a school of spirituality that has come to be known in modern days as "devout humanism."[8]

[7] "Il avait appris de son maître que la religion vient de la bonté de Dieu; qu'elle est dans le cœur humain, qu'elle naît de la reconnaissance." Aimé-Martin, *Essai sur la vie et les ouvrages de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, 208.

[8] The term *humanisme dévot* was introduced by Henri Bremond in *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, Vol. 1. Devout humanism can be distinguished from both the Christian (Erasmian) and pagan humanisms of the same time period: see Hatzfeld, "Christian, Pagan, and Devout Humanism in Sixteenth-Century France."

Fénelon and his predecessors – François de Sales, Vincent de Paul, Pierre de Bérulle, and Jean-Jacques Olier – promote a sincere, inner devotion to God based on love rather than fear. This brand of spirituality is wholly compatible with that of *Paul et Virginie*, even if the theology behind it is not.

The principal goal of the devout humanists, from St. François de Sales to Fénelon, is "to cultivate in oneself the love of God."[9] Accordingly, Fénelon's writings are more practical than theoretical. They stress the inner transformation that is required to rid oneself of all vestiges of selfishness and learn to love God – not because of what he can do for us, but simply because he is God. This emphasis on the reality and the importance of one's inner spiritual life comes alongside a zeal to oppose a conception of religion focused entirely on exterior performance. Fénelon repeatedly contrasts a type of worship revolving around ritual and ceremony with the "true worship" that takes place in the heart. "It is so easy to adore you with ceremonies and praises! But so few souls offer up this inner worship. Alas! We see nothing anywhere but a pretense of religion, a Judaic religion," he writes, attacking the outward religiosity of his day.[10] He likewise cites the prophet Joel's words, "Rend your hearts and not your garments," in order to support his admonition that God is not satisfied with confession of sin when unaccompanied by a sincerely repentant heart.[11] True inner worship is that of a pure heart that loves God above all and is willing to submit to his will in faith no matter what the cost.

A century later, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre is still eager to distinguish the true, inner worship of Paul and Virginie from the hypocritical religiosity of others. It is not Paul and Virginie's attendance at church or long public prayers that make them true

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[9] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 510.
[10] "Qu'il est aisé de vous adorer par des ceremonies et des louanges! mais qu'il y a peu d'âmes qui vous rendent ce culte intérieur! Hélas! on ne voit partout qu'une religion en figure, qu'une religion judaïque." Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 1:961.
[11] Ibid., 1:771-773.

worshipers of God, but rather the love and gratitude exhibited in their hearts wherever they go: "for, if they didn't offer long prayers at church, wherever they were – in the house, in the fields, in the woods – they raised innocent hands toward heaven along with hearts full of love for their parents."[12] They see God all around them and constantly demonstrate their selfless desire to do good for others. The counter-example is found in the rich, cruel aunt of Madame de la Tour, who is an atheist until her old age, when she begins to alternate between her usual bitter contempt for all humanity and her newfound superstitious mortal terror. Bernardin mocks her selfish attempt to placate God through donating her fortune to a group of rich monks, "as if the goods she had withheld from the poor could please the father of mankind!"[13] Neither her donations nor the emotion inciting her nightmares and sending her to the feet of her confessors has any merit, for her desire is only to escape personal judgment. She knows nothing of true love for God, having hardened her heart by sacrificing all things to gain riches.[14] In the end, her fearful superstition, impoverishment, and eventual death are all portrayed as the just recompense for her selfish life.

While Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Fénelon both stress the importance of the inner spiritual life, they likely do not do so for exactly the same reasons. Given that *Paul et Virginie* presents criticisms of organized religion and appears favorable toward natural religion, Bernardin's emphasis on the sincere worship of the heart might reflect foremost a desire to cast off the authority of the Church while still preserving a space for spirituality – one that pleases God but is not subject to outside judgment. Fénelon was

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[12] "s'ils n'offraient pas à l'église de longues prières, partout où ils étaient, dans la maison, dans les champs, dans les bois, ils levaient vers le ciel des mains innocentes et un coeur plein de l'amour de leurs parents." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 99.

[13] "comme si des biens qu'elle avait refusés aux malheureux pouvaient plaire au père des hommes!" Ibid., 199.

[14] Ibid., 200.

not critical of organized religion, but he did seek to correct a "false idea of piety" according to which "one can only serve God with a somber and despondent life."[15] In contrast to the stern morality of the Jansenists, for example, Fénelon taught that Christians are free to participate in games and amusements that are "innocent in themselves," so long as they do so in moderation.[16] Our aim should not be to accomplish "certain extraordinary and difficult actions" but to "purify [our] intentions, die to [our] natural inclinations," and "walk in simplicity of heart with peace and joy, which are the fruits of the Holy Spirit."[17] This is the spiritual life exemplified by Virginie: a simple, joyful walk with God, faithful unto death.

Charles Taylor remarks that the opponents of devout humanism included not only the Jansenists, but also many others who represented a "strand of hyper-Augustinian spirituality which was so powerful in that age."[18] They emphasized man's depravity and consequently his distance from God to such an extent that they viewed the Fénelonian freedom to approach God in love as presumptuous. Instead, they promoted a religion of fearful obedience to God's commandments in the hope of receiving mercy. Taylor goes on to argue that the continued emphasis on external conduct in eighteenth-century religion "helps explain how the new affirmation of human innocence arose [among secular thinkers] as a reaction to this sense of depravity and fear."[19]

In any event, since Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was one of those who denied the depravity of man and affirmed the goodness of nature, he could not have found affinity

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[15] "… ne serviraient qu'à donner une fausse idée de la piété aux gens du monde, […] qui croiraient qu'on ne peut servir Dieu que par une vie sombre et chagrine." Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 1:559.
[16] Ibid., 1:558-559.
[17] "Marchons dans la simplicité du coeur avec la paix et la joie, qui sont les fruits du Saint-Esprit." "La plupart des gens, […] songent bien plus à remplir leur vie de certaines actions difficiles et extraordinaires, qu'à purifier leurs intentions, et à mourir à leurs inclinations naturelles..." Ibid., 1:559.
[18] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 227.
[19] Ibid., 228.

with any religious tradition emphasizing fear. Instead, he specifically cites Fénelon as the model of one who, following God's example, loves others unconditionally in order to inspire their love in response, rather than scaring them into fearful obedience. Bernardin imagines a conversation between "a man like Fénelon" and a tribal druid, where the Fénelon-figure remarks, "Your religion is to govern people through fear; mine is to guide them through love, imitating [God's] sun, which he makes to shine on both the righteous and the wicked."[20] Here, Bernardin is faithful to Fénelon in representing him as one who urged those in authority, particularly monarchs, to govern as fathers and "love your people as your own children," thus imitating the heavenly Father and inspiring the love of their subjects in return.[21] Bernardin demonstrates the same philosophy and the same critique of fear-motivated religion in *Paul et Virginie*, where he attributes Paul and Virginie's childhood goodness in part to the fact that "no one ever frightened them by telling them that God reserves terrible punishments for ungrateful children." Instead, the children naturally practice obedience out of love for their mothers who first loved them: "for them, filial love was born from maternal love."[22] While Fénelon was not the only one who urged monarchs to act as loving fathers in imitation of the heavenly Father, there is no doubt that Bernardin associated this idea with Fénelon, as his 1792 preface to *Études de la nature* directly addresses King Louis XVI, citing a long passage from *Télémaque* concerning the affection that a king must have for his subjects, while urging the king to "recover the maxims of Fénelon in the depths of [his] heart."[23]

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[20] "Votre religion est de les gouverner par la crainte; la mienne est de les conduire par l'amour, et d'imiter son soleil, qu'il fait luire sur les bons comme sur les méchants." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature*, 96.

[21] "Aimez vos peuples comme vos enfants." Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 2:16.

[22] "On ne les avait jamais effrayés en leur disant que Dieu réserve des punitions terribles aux enfants ingrats; chez eux l'amitié filiale était née de l'amitié maternelle." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 99.

[23] "vous retrouverez les maximes de Fénelon au fond de votre propre coeur." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature*, 51.

It is clear from these examples that, no matter what disagreements Bernardin de Saint-Pierre might have with Fénelon and the devout humanists concerning doctrinal particulars, their brand of spirituality was still one that appealed to him very much. They held a common perspective on religion that prioritizes internal realities over external performances. In addition, they both strongly opposed fear-motivated religions and instead taught that obedience and adoration to God should be motivated by love and gratitude for the love that God first showed mankind. In other words, they viewed worship not as the means, but the response, to God's mercy.

PUR AMOUR AND SELF-RENOUNCEMENT

Bernardin's Fénelonian approach to defining true worship of God does not stop at the call to love him sincerely and serve him out of gratitude rather than out of fear. In fact, Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie* continues to echo Fénelon's teaching on the concepts of *pur amour*, or pure love, and self-renouncement. Fénelon's *Explication des maximes des saints sur la vie intérieure* (1697) distinguishes five categories of love, from the most selfish to the most pure, disinterested, or selfless.[24] The entirety of his teaching is concerned with the achievement of *pur amour*, which he calls "the highest degree of Christian perfection."[25] This is a state of renunciation of one's self and one's desires in order to find peace and happiness in seeking only God's will and God's glory. In *Paul et Virginie*, it is the wise old man who explains these principles, while Virginie lives up to them, and Paul does not.

Both Fénelon and the old man narrating *Paul et Virginie* make the forceful claim that our hearts belong only to God, and therefore, it is idolatrous to hold anything or

[24] Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 1:1008-1012.
[25] "Cet amour pur est le plus haut degré de la perfection chrétienne." Ibid., 1:1004.

anyone other than God too close to the heart. Even legitimate things, gifts of God like family and friends, we must never "hold by the heart," Fénelon writes. Rather, we must "be ready to lose them when God takes them away, and never seek in them the true resting place of one's heart," since "if you're grasping at a creature with the depths of your heart, your heart is no longer worthy of [God]."[26] In the same way, the old man of *Paul et Virginie* teaches that we must keep a certain distance away from others, not to say that we must live alone, for we certainly have duties toward others. Yet, he wants Paul to understand that "just as God has given to each of us various organs corresponding to the earth where we live – feet for the ground, lungs for the air, eyes for light […] – so he has reserved for himself alone, the author of life, the principal organ of life: the heart."[27] This is a lesson that becomes particularly relevant to Paul when Virginie is taken away from him.

Fénelon writes that the loss of friendship constitutes a test to determine whether we loved our friends for God's sake and his intentions, or for our own selfish motives. "Disturb this friendship which seems so pure, and our pride is devastated; we complain; we want to be pitied; we're beside ourselves; it's for our own sake that we're upset, which proves that it was only ourselves that we loved in our friend."[28] Sadness at the loss of our friends, he writes, only gives evidence to the fact that our love was selfish. On the other hand, if it is God rather than ourselves that we love in others, and "the friendship is

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[26] "d'être prêt à les perdre quand Dieu les ôtera, et de ne vouloir jamais chercher en eux le vrai repos de son coeur. […] si vous tenez par le fond du coeur à quelque créature, votre coeur n'est plus digne de lui." Ibid., 1:618.

[27] "comme Dieu a donné à chacun de nous des organes parfaitement assortis aux éléments du globe où nous vivons, des pieds pour le sol, des poumons pour l'air, des yeux pour la lumière, […] Il s'est réservé pour Lui seul, qui est l'auteur de la vie, le coeur, qui en est le principal organe." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 156.

[28] "troublez cette amitié qui semble si pure, l'amour-propre est désolé; il se plaint; il veut qu'on le plaigne; il se dépite; il est hors de lui; c'est pour soi qu'on est fâché, ce qui marque que c'est soi-même qu'on aimait dans son ami." Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 1:608.

broken by the command of God, everything is peaceful in the depths of our soul."[29] This is exactly the test with which Paul is faced at the end of *Paul et Virginie*, and it is exactly the lesson with which the old man rebukes Paul as he struggles to cope with Virginie's tragic death. "What are you lamenting with such bitterness? Is it your misfortune? Is it Virginie's?" he asks, forcing Paul to admit that his grief comes only as the result of his own shattered dreams.[30] He goes on to argue that Virginie lived virtuously and is now happy with God in heaven, and Paul should be happy too. Even after such a hardship, the old man expects Paul to humble himself and submit to God's plan, since it was, after all, "God himself who used the passions of others to take from you the object of your love."[31] As Fénelon writes, "it is necessary to prefer God over ourselves, and not to desire our blessing for any other reason than his glory."[32] Paul made the mistake of assuming that a future with Virginie had been promised to him. He would have done well to remember what Fénelon taught about cultivating a "spirit of disappropriation": recognizing that the gifts God gives us are never ours to keep, but are only lent for the purposes of the lender.[33]

Despite the old man's urging, Paul is unable to recover from his grief. He follows Virginie to the grave, and the rest of the family follows suit. In the end, it is only Virginie who achieves Fénelon's ideal of pure love for God. Her acquiescence to leave her home in the first place is a sacrifice made in submission to God's will, as she cries, "If it's the command of God, I won't stand in the way of anything. May God's will be

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[29] "si l'amitié se rompt par ordre de Dieu, tout est paisible au fond de l'âme." Ibid., 1:608.
[30] "Que déplorez-vous avec tant d'amertume? est-ce votre malheur? est-ce celui de Virginie?" Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 191.
[31] "mais Dieu même, qui a employé les passions d'autrui pour vous ôter l'objet de votre amour." Ibid., 193.
[32] "il faut préférer Dieu à nous; et ne vouloir plus notre béatitude que pour sa gloire." Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 1:656.
[33] "esprit de désappropriation." Ibid., 1:620.

done!"[34] As a child, she had learned along with Paul to have no other philosophy but that of "resigning oneself to the will of God," according to Fénelon's teaching that "peace of the soul consists of being entirely resigned to the will of God."[35] When tested with grief, though, Paul is overcome, whereas Virginie continually maintains her perspective on the will of God. While in France, though unhappy, she writes, "as for my sorrows, I soothe them by remembering that I am in a position where you placed me by the will of God."[36] Even her death is a triumph, one that she accepts gladly with a fearlessness to follow God. She earns not only the praise of the narrator, but that of her entire community, who deems her a saint.[37]

In all these ways, the devotion to God that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre represents in *Paul et Virginie* matches the teaching of Fénelon. Admittedly, the concept of self-renouncement was shared by many Christians in the Augustinian tradition, including Bossuet and Jansenists like Pascal. Bernardin does mention Bossuet and Pascal three times each within his *Études de la nature* – compared with Fénelon's twenty-four times – but never with the glowing praises he lavishes upon Fénelon. Furthermore, Fénelon became well known for the teachings of *pur amour* and self-renouncement as a result of his defense of Madame Guyon's Quietist doctrine, and of the subsequent Quietist Controversy. Madame Guyon taught that, through a single act of self-annihilation and giving up of one's will, one could reach a passive state of union with God. One of the most contentious of her arguments, one repeated by Fénelon in his *Maximes des saints*, maintains that one should have such a disinterested love for God so as to be indifferent to

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[34] "Si c'est l'ordre de Dieu, je ne m'oppose à rien. Que la volonté de Dieu soit faite!" Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 138.
[35] "il ne connaissaient […] d'autre philosophique que de […] se résigner à la volonté de Dieu." Ibid., 152; "La paix de l'âme consiste dans une entière résignation à la volonté de Dieu." Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 1:655.
[36] "pour mes peines, je les adoucis en pensant que je suis dans un poste où vous m'avez mise par la volonté de Dieu." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 152.
[37] Ibid., 186.

one's own salvation. In other words, one should happily be willing to accept eternal damnation if that were God's will. Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux and court preacher to Louis XIV, found this argument both absurd and dangerous, and condemned it along with many of Madame Guyon's other teachings at the 1695 Conference at Issy. In writing the *Maximes*, Fénelon intended to correct common misunderstandings surrounding mystical doctrine. To this end, he painstakingly distinguishes the teachings of the approved mystics – canonized authors such as Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint John of the Cross, and Saint François de Sales – from the teachings of some Quietists who took their mysticism to heretical proportions. Only after much political intrigue and pressure from Bossuet and Louis XIV was Fénelon's *Maximes* condemned by a papal brief.[38]

While the Quietist Controversy certainly allowed Fénelon's name to be publicly associated with the concepts of *pur amour* and self-renouncement, there are even greater reasons to acknowledge that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre most associates these ideas with Fénelon. For one thing, his praise of Fénelon centers on his estimation that Fénelon was successful where others were not in practicing what he preached, demonstrating a true love for God. "No matter how much we compare Bossuet and Fénelon, I am incapable of assessing their worth," he writes. "Yet the latter seems to me quite preferable to his rival. He fulfilled, it seems to me, the two points of the law: he loved God and men."[39] By referencing Jesus' statement in the gospel of Matthew that the entire Law and Prophets are summed up by the commandments to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and to "love your neighbor as yourself,"

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[38] For an excellent summary of the Quietist Controversy and eventually condemnation of the *Maximes*, see Helms, "Introduction," 84-113. See also Janet, *Fénelon*, 63-145. For more on Fénelon's mysticism, see Davis, *Fénelon*, 74-89; Cagnac, *Fénelon*, 297-336; and Gouhier, *Fénelon philosophe*, 77-127.

[39] "On a beau comparer Bossuet et Fénelon: je ne suis pas capable d'apprécier leur mérite; mais le second me paraît bien préférable à son rival. Il a rempli, ce me semble, les deux points de la loi: IL A AIMÉ DIEU ET LES HOMMES." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature*, 581.

the claim that Fénelon "loved God" cannot but indicate an all-consuming, self-sacrificial *pur amour*.[40] Could it be coincidental that the "virtue" for which Bernardin continually praises both Virginie and Fénelon is defined, like *pur amour*, as the submission of one's own will in favor of accomplishing the will of God, without any desire for reward? When the old man defines virtue as "an effort made on ourselves for the good of others with the intention of pleasing God alone,"[41] he is describing Fénelonian *pur amour*.[42] Given both Bernardin's great admiration for Fénelon and the similarity of their beliefs, it seems quite reasonable that Virginie's model of pure-hearted devotion to God is directly inspired from Fénelon.

So far, we have examined aspects of Bernardin's religion that appear to be borrowed from Fénelon. These mostly center on his philosophy of worship: the two men can agree that true religion takes place in the heart, that it is motivated by love for God rather than fear, and that we should strive for loving God purely, which means submitting one's self and one's desires to his will. The question that remains to be answered centers on how Bernardin could reconcile his admiration for Fénelon, on the one hand, with his non-orthodox beliefs, such as man's natural goodness and the sufficiency of natural revelation, on the other. Why bother championing a Christian philosopher so strongly while simultaneously denying some of the most important fundamentals of the Christian faith? The next two sections venture to speculate that yet another reason why Bernardin was more favorable toward Fénelon than other Christian thinkers is precisely because

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[40] Matt. 22:37-40 (NASB)

[41] "La vertu est un effort fait sur nous-mêmes pour le bien d'autrui dans l'intention de plaire à Dieu seul." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 171.

[42] While Fénelonian *pur amour* and Bernardin's *vertu* both involve the submission of one's own will to God's, the two are different in that *pur amour* is a mystical state of union involving personal participation in God's will. Arguably, by rejecting original sin, Bernardin allows for the possibility of achieving human perfection without the need for a mystical state.

several works of Fénelon – indeed, the ones he appreciated the most – allowed him to ignore or misconstrue Fénelon's theology to be more consistent with his own. *Télémaque* and the *Traité de l'existence de Dieu*, we will see, contain many ideas that Bernardin agreed with, yet they also leave open the door for him to ignore or rewrite those orthodox Christian ideas he did not agree with.

UTOPIAN VISIONS

Fénelon's *Télémaque* appears that it would appeal to Bernardin not for any theology he shared with its author, but for a shared vision of the ideal life as one of simplicity, virtue, and harmony with nature. In fact, he says as much himself, opening a paragraph of praise about the novel with the words, "*Télémaque* appeared, and this book recalled Europe to the harmonies of nature. [...] It led peoples and kings back to the useful arts, to commerce, to agriculture, and above all to the sentiment of the divine."[43]

In Book Seven of *Télémaque*, Fénelon presents a utopia that parallels the idyllic childhood home of Paul and Virginie in many ways. While Paul and Virginie's mothers renounce their former social distinctions and build a community of equals where "everything between them was shared," the people of Bétique likewise boast of a society where there is "no distinction" and "all goods are shared."[44] Both societies are characterized by familial love and complete moral innocence. The Bétiques "all love each other with a brotherly love," just as the mothers call each other "friend, companion, and sister."[45] In the land of Bétique, "neither pride, nor haughtiness, nor bad faith, nor

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[43] "Le *Télémaque* parût, et ce livre rappela l'Europe aux harmonies de la nature. [...] Il ramena les peuples et les rois aux arts utiles, au commerce, à l'agriculture, et sur-tout au sentiment de la divinité." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature*, 581.

[44] "tout entre elles était commun." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 96; "aucune distinction," "tous les biens sont communs," Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 2:108.

[45] "ils s'aiment tous d'une amour fraternelle." Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 2:108; "se donnant les doux noms d'amie, de compagne et de soeur." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 96.

desire to dominate others" can be found, but only innocence and sincerity. In the same way, nothing troubles the idyll of Paul and Virginie: neither envy, nor ambition, nor worry, nor immoderation, nor unhappy passions. Instead, "love, innocence, and piety developed the beauty of their souls into ineffable graces every day."[46] Even daily occupations and attitudes are the same for both the Bétiques and the community of Paul and Virginie: both value the hard work of agriculture far above commercial ventures, and they seek only daily provisions, not abundance. Bernardin's utopia thus bears a striking resemblance to that of Fénelon. For sure, the Bétiques embody many of Rousseau's ideals as well, yet neither Rousseau's portrayal of the savage man nor that of his own "golden age" of early society matches the description of the Bétiques so well as does *Paul et Virginie*.

To what degree might Fénelon's and Bernardin's visions of the ideal world be reflective of their theology, after all? For Bernardin, as we have observed, Paul and Virginie's innocence is indeed a theological assertion, one that rejects the doctrine of original sin. Might Bernardin have interpreted Fénelon's description of the Bétiques in the same way, as a confirmation of man's natural goodness? After all, the Bétiques achieve their happy, wise, and sinless lifestyle through simply "following nature," and their utopian society is not presented as a fable but as an attainable goal, a true alternative to the corrupt lifestyle to which man is accustomed.[47] As Telemachus marvels, "We're so spoiled that we can hardly believe that such a natural simplicity could be possible. We view the customs of these people as a lovely fable, and they must view ours as a hideous

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[46] "Chaque jour était pour ces familles un jour de bonheur et de paix. Ni l'envie ni l'ambition ne les tourmentaient." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* 111; "Aucun souci n'avait ridé leur front, aucune intempérance n'avait corrompu leur sang, aucune passion malheureuse n'avait dépravé leur coeur: l'amour, l'innocence, la piété, développaient chaque jour la beauté de leur âme en grâces ineffables." Ibid., 126.

[47] "suivant la droite nature." Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 2:112.

dream."[48] A believer in original sin, though, could certainly be edified by the story of the Bétiques without presuming that such a society could ever be achieved by naturally sinful people. After all, the story is a utopia, not a theology. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, however, takes the story much more seriously, even to the point of asking why there are so few attempts like it to describe societies that have achieved a lifestyle reconciling the necessities of life with the laws of nature. Such a society as theirs, according to him, "would attain the highest degree of social happiness that humankind is capable of achieving."[49] There is thus no doubt that, for Bernardin, the society of the Bétiques is more than a fable, more than an enchanting utopia, but even an attainable goal, made possible by man's natural goodness.

Unfortunately for Bernardin, even if he wanted to interpret the story of the Bétiques as a confirmation of natural goodness, he should have known that deriving Fénelon's theology from *Télémaque* is inherently problematic, for a number of reasons. For one, *Télémaque* was published in the midst of the Quietist Controversy, even in the very year that the *Maximes* was condemned, which conceivably might have affected Fénelon's willingness to publish anything in the realm of theology. Even more significant, though, is the fact that the novel is set within the cultural and historical context of ancient Greece, preventing any explicit reference to the yet-future birth of Christianity. Although the novel imparts an abundance of wisdom concerning morality and politics, it comes amidst a culture of Greek mythology.

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[48] "Nous sommes tellement gâtés, qu'à peine pouvons-nous croire que cette simplicité si naturelle puisse être véritable. Nous regardons les moeurs de ce peuple comme une belle fable, et il doit regarder les nôtres comme un songe monstrueux." Ibid.

[49] "je m'étonne qu'on n'ait pas présenté au moins un tableau d'une société humaine, concordante ainsi avec tous les besoins de la vie et les lois de la nature. Il y en a quelques essais dans le Télémaque, entre autres, dans les moeurs des peuples de la Boétique; mais ils ne sont qu'indiqués. Je crois qu'une pareille société atteindrait au plus grand degré de bonheur social où puisse parvenir la nature humaine sur la terre." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature*, 474.

It would be absurd, however, to presume that *Télémaque*'s lack of reference to the Christian God indicates a claim on Fénelon's part that man is capable of pursuing and achieving good through his own effort and apart from any reliance on God. There is no reason to think that Fénelon denied the doctrine of original sin. In fact, a more balanced investigation of his entire oeuvre makes clear that he holds to the depravity of man and subsequent dependence of man upon God's grace just as much as any Jansenist.

Concerning original sin, Fénelon's *Instructions sur les sacrements* (published 1707) affirms Catholic teaching that "all the sons of Adam are born in the sin of their first father, they are children of wrath, unworthy of heavenly inheritance, and enveloped in the general damnation," which is a "state of loss and of death" from which Jesus Christ came to save us.[50] The natural goodness of man that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre proclaims is nothing but a myth for Fénelon: his *De l'éducation des filles* (published 1687) argues that any child should recognize that "he was born with inclinations contrary to reason," that his soul does not have mastery over his body, and that "the cause of this disorder [is] in the story of Adam's sin," a story which makes him "await the Savior, who is to reconcile men with God."[51] The Savior is, of course, Jesus Christ, who "delivered himself to death to redeem us from slavery to sin."[52] Fénelon also upholds the Catholic belief that, upon each individual's entrance into the Church though baptism, "original sin is fully washed away, and none of the old condemnation remains." At the same moment, those individuals "receive a true regeneration, they are reborn through grace, they become

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[50] "tous les enfants d'Adam naissent dans le péché de leur premier père, qu'ils sont enfants de colère, indignes de l'héritage céleste, et enveloppés dans la damnation générale. C'est pour les retirer de cet état de perte et de mort que Jésus-Christ, sauveur de tous les hommes, a institué le sacrement de baptême." Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 2:923.

[51] "Ensuite [l'enfant] songera qu'il est né avec des inclinations contraires à la raison, [...] et que son corps entraîne son âme contre la raison, [...] au lieu que son âme devrait gouverner son corps; il apercevra la cause de ce désordre dans l'histoire du péché d'Adam; cette histoire lui fera attendre le Sauveur, qui doit réconcilier les hommes avec Dieu." Ibid., 1:133.

[52] [Le Fils de Dieu] s'[est] livré à la mort pour nous racheter de l'esclavage du péché." Ibid., 2:931.

adopted children of the Father, brothers and co-heirs of the Son, and temples of the Holy Spirit."[53] This entire work of salvation is "sheer grace" that is "based on nothing but the freely given promise and followed by the equally freely given application of the merits of Jesus Christ."[54] Fénelon thus has confidence not in man's unhindered ability to reach God through his own effort, but in God's faithfulness to a promise he already gave: our merits "are not founded on a rigorous law, but only on a promise made out of pure mercy."[55]

Just as eternal life is based not on our merits but on the merits of Christ, so the ability to live a godly life, according to Fénelon, depends not what we accomplish through our will and our works, but on God working through us. One of his letters stresses the importance of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which animates, enlightens, and unites us with God.[56] Without this inspiration, "we can neither do, nor will, nor believe any good," so that we may not boast: any good we do is the work of the Spirit.[57] Left to our own behavior, spending time as we see fit, and working by our own effort, we can only create "a work of *amour-propre*, of sin and of damnation."[58] For this reason, we depend continually on God's grace, without which it is impossible for us to do good:

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[53] "Non seulement le péché originel y est pleinement effacé [dans la fontaine de vie, le baptême], et *il ne reste rien de* l'ancienne *condamnation*, [...] mais encore ils reçoivent une vraie régénération, ils renaissent par la vertu de la grâce, ils deviennent enfants adoptifs du Père, frères et cohéritiers du Fils, temples du Saint-Esprit." Ibid., 2:923.

[54] "La vie éternelle n'est-elle pas une pure grâce […]? […] Cette grâce […] n'est fondée sur aucun titre que sur la promesse purement gratuite et suivie de l'application aussi gratuite des mérites de Jésus-Christ." Ibid., 1:661.

[55] "nos mérites ne sont point fondés sur un droit rigoreux, mais seulement sur une promesse faite par pure miséricorde." Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 1:589-591.

[57] "Sans l'inspiration actuelle de l'esprit de grâce, nous ne pouvons ni faire, ni vouloir, ni croire aucun bien." Ibid., 1:590; "c'est son Esprit qui parle, qui nous touche, qui opère en nous, et qui nous anime, en sorte que cet Esprit fait en nous tout ce que nous faisons de bien." Ibid., 1:591.

[58] "je tiendrais ma perte assurée, si vous me laissiez à ma propre conduite, disposant à mon gré des temps précieux que vous me donnez pour me sanctifier, et marchant aveuglément dans les voies de mon propre coeur. [...] que serais-je capable d'opérer en moi, qu'un ouvrage d'amour-propre, de péché et de damnation?" Ibid., 1:557.

> Without grace animating us, we would see the good without having the strength to prefer it over the evils that indulge our passions and we would languish, saying as did Saint Paul: *Alas! I do not do the good that I desire, but I do the evil that I do not desire*."[59]

Without the grace of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then, man has no choice but to continue doing evil. In this light, Fénelon's society of the Bétiques might represent an ideal of what man could accomplish only by depending on God's power to resist sin. *Télémaque* does not explain how the Bétiques resist sin, after all; only that they do. Any mention of the Holy Spirit, of course, would have been anachronistic within the Hellenic culture permeating the novel.

In the absence of such clarifications regarding Fénelon's theology, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was at liberty to misunderstand *Télémaque*, reading his own beliefs concerning natural goodness into the novel and assuming that its author believed likewise. This hypothesis would help to explain why Bernardin's admiration for Fénelon was unhindered by their theological differences, which, when examined, are great. Incidentally, I am not the first to suggest that Bernardin's admiration for Fénelon is tied to the concealment of the doctrine of original sin in Fénelon's most well-known writings. A similar view can be found in Albert Chérel's classic 1912 work on Fénelon's legacy in the eighteenth century. Chérel first remarks that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre managed to preserve a strong admiration for Fénelon even while Bernardin became increasingly hostile toward Christianity in general. This loyalty to Fénelon he attributes, in part, to the fact that Bernardin "did not discern […] the doctrine of original sin" in Fénelon's *Traité de l'existence de Dieu*, a work that served as inspiration for Bernardin's own *Études de la*

[59] "si la grâce ne nous animait, nous verrions le bien sans avoir la force de l'aimer par préférence aux maux qui flattent nous passions et nous languirions, disant comme saint Paul: *Hélas! je ne fait pas le bien que je veux et je fait le mal que je ne veux pas* [Rom 7:15]." Ibid., 1:765.

nature.[60] If this is the case, it serves to confirm that Fénelon's popularity among later, more secular, thinkers such as Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre might not simply depend on what he emphasized but also on what he failed to emphasize.

GOD IN NATURE

After *Télémaque*, the most frequently cited of Fénelon's works in Bernardin's *Études* is the *Traité de l'existence de Dieu*. Both of these works, it turns out, are susceptible to misinterpretation in a similar way. Just as Bernardin could have viewed *Télémaque* as favorable toward his belief in man's goodness, since it makes no reference to original sin, he might likewise have viewed the *Traité de l'existence de Dieu* as favorable toward his belief in the sufficiency of natural revelation, since it stresses God's presence in nature and makes only minimal reference to the Christian Scriptures.

Like *Télémaque*, the *Traité de l'existence de Dieu*[61] contains an abundance of ideas that appealed to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. His own *Études* builds on Fénelon's *Traité* and repeats many of its main claims: first, that the evidence for God's existence is to be found all over nature, but also that reason is hardly enough to prove or convince people of that fact. Rather, we depend on our inner feelings, God speaking to the heart, to gain certainty. These ideas were hardly unique to Fénelon and Bernardin, and it is not my interest to argue that Bernardin adopted these ideas from Fénelon, just that he

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[60] "il n'apercevait pas dans *l'Existence de Dieu* le dogme du péché originel." Chérel, *Fénelon au XVIIIe siècle*, 470-471. Bernardin's *Études* is presented as the development of Fénelon's *Traité* in Aimé-Martin, *Essai sur la vie et les ouvrages de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, 207.

[61] What has come to be known as Fénelon's *Traité de l'existence de Dieu* is actually the compilation of two separate works written at different times of Fénelon's life. The so-called first part was originally published in 1712 as *Démonstration de l'existence de Dieu tirée de la connaissance de la Nature et proportionnée à la faible intelligence des plus simples*. In 1718, after the death of Fénelon, a second part, previously unpublished but composed before the first, was included. The first part was titled *Démonstration de l'existence de Dieu, tirée de l'art de la Nature*, while the second part was titled *Démonstration de l'existence de Dieu et de ses attributs, tirée des preuves purement intellectuelles et de l'idée de l'Infini même*.

recognized them in Fénelon and thereby found additional grounds for his affinity with him. However, what is absent from Fénelon's *Traité*, namely, a reliance on special revelation in addition to natural revelation, certainly appealed to Bernardin just as much. Whereas Fénelon's letters and lesser known works, again, do reveal the important place he gives to the Scriptures, Bernardin presents the Bible as beneficial but unnecessary, as it is completely in accord with what is revealed through nature. With its apologetic aim and focus on natural revelation, though, Fénelon's *Traité* secures Bernardin's approval as a work which is both loyal and non-threatening to his religious beliefs.

As suggested in the previous chapter, *Paul et Virginie* presents nature as the revelation of God in two distinct ways. First, the novel accepts the Deist view of nature: that the beauty, order, and design of the universe bear testimony to the existence of its Creator. The old man of *Paul et Virginie* insists that "there is a God, my son: all of nature announces it; I do not have to prove it to you."[62] Bernardin alludes to the teleological argument for God's existence, or the argument from design, every time he mentions the "harmonies of nature," such a prominent theme in the *Études*. Similarly, the first half of Fénelon's *Traité de l'existence de Dieu* is devoted to the subject, beginning with the admission that "I cannot open my eyes without admiring the art that shines throughout all nature. The slightest glance is enough to perceive the hand that makes everything."[63]

In *Paul et Virginie*, however, nature does not merely refer to the created world that gives evidence to God's existence, but also to God's presence in that created world: nature is his dwelling place, the source of his ongoing blessings, and the instrument of his

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[62] "Il y a un Dieu, mon fils: toute la nature l'annonce; je n'ai pas besoin de vous le prouver." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 194.

[63] "Je ne puis ouvrir les yeux sans admirer l'art qui éclate dans toute la nature. Le moindre coup d'oeil suffit pour apercevoir la main qui fait tout." Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 2:509.

communication with men. It is for this reason that Bernardin can recommend solitude to allow the soul to "recover the simple feeling of itself, of nature and its author," and can speak of "the involuntary feeling that makes us raise our eyes to heaven [lit. "the sky"], seeking help in midst of grief," and, finally, "the feelings that nature gives to prevent us from falling into misfortune."[64] Such an emphasis on "feelings" is characteristic of Bernardin's epistemology, which Colas Duflo summarizes with the claim that "it is feeling, not reason, that gives us access to the most essential truths."[65] In contrast to the growing emphasis on the sovereignty of reason among Enlightenment philosophers, Bernardin remains intent on preserving a space for knowledge from other sources. His understanding of "nature" includes the notion that sentiment, conscience, the heart, and even dreams and visions constitute a source of knowledge that "surpass[es] the light of human reason."[66] The narrator of *Paul et Virginie* contrasts the limits of reason and philosophy with the limitlessness of a mystic-like connection with the Divine in the following words:

> You other Europeans, your minds are filled from infancy with so many prejudices adverse to happiness, you can't even imagine that nature can give such knowledge and joys. Your souls, limited to a small sphere of human understanding, soon reach the end of their artificial pleasures: but nature and the heart are inexhaustible.[67]

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[64] "elle reprend le sentiment simple d'elle-même, de la nature et de son auteur." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 156; "le sentiment involontaire qui nous fait lever les yeux au ciel, dans l'excès de la douleur, our y chercher du secours." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature*, 259; "sentiments que donnent la nature pour nous empêcher de tomber dans le malheur." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 120.

[65] "C'est le sentiment et non la raison qui nous fait accéder aux vérités les plus essentielles." Duflo, "Le hussard et l'inscription," 20.

[66] "surpassent la lumière de la raison humaine." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 198.

[67] "Vous autres Européens, dont l'esprit se remplit dès l'enfance de tant de préjugés contraires au bonheur, vous ne pouvez concevoir que la nature puisse donner tant de lumières et de plaisirs. Votre âme, circonscrite dans une petite sphère de connaissances humaines, atteint bientôt le terme de ses jouissances artificielles: mais la nature et le coeur sont inépuisables." Ibid., 125.

If nature and the heart are inexhaustible, it is because they reveal an infinite God. Nature is the means through which God communicates truths about himself. Bernardin explains: "It is not to our faculties of reason that God communicates the most profound sentiment of his attributes, but rather to our ignorance. Night gives us a greater idea of the infinite than all the radiance of day."[68] With these comments, Bernardin tacitly condemns the philosophers and scientists of his day who he views as seeking knowledge and happiness on their own terms, in prideful exaltation of their own intelligence. By linking divine wisdom to sentiments of the heart, he makes it accessible to all mankind.

Fénelon's *Traité* expresses a similar argument in that it follows up a discussion of the teleological argument for God's existence in the first part with an emphasis on the role of sentiment in gaining knowledge of God in second part. Yes, God can be found in nature, he writes,

> But I also find you in another place. You emerge, so to speak, from my own heart [...]. This idea that I carry around inside of myself of a necessary and infinitely perfect being, what does it say, if I listen from the bottom of my heart? Who put it there, if not you, or if the idea itself is not you? [...] This infinite idea of the infinite within a finite being, is it not the seal of the almighty craftsman, which he imprinted upon his handiwork?[69]

Here, Fénelon gives God the credit for originating the "ideas" – spontaneously occurring thoughts – that free him from the overpowering distress of Cartesian universal doubt.[70] While his faculties of reason fail to give him the certainty he seeks, he is forced to reckon with "ideas": ideas about his own existence, ideas about the necessary being, ideas that,

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[68] "Ce n'est point à nos lumières que la Divinité communique le sentiment le plus profond de ses attributs, c'est à notre ignorance. La nuit nous donne une plus grande idée de l'infini que tout l'éclat du jour." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature*, 464.

[69] "Mais je vous retrouve encore par un autre endroit. Vous sortez, pour ainsi dire, du fond de moi-même [...]. Cette idée que je porte au-dedans de moi-même d'un être nécessaire et infiniment parfait, que dit-elle, si je l'écoute au fond de mon coeur? Qui l'y a mise, si ce n'est vous? [...] Cette idée infinie de l'infini dans un esprit borné, n'est-elle pas le sceau de l'ouvrier tout-puissant, qu'il a imprimé sur son ouvrage?" Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 2:622-623.

[70] Ibid., 2:598-599

admittedly, "[are] in me, but [are] not me."[71] Both Fénelon and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre are particularly swayed by the idea of the infinite. All of these ideas, found in the depths of the human heart, serve as Fénelon's most powerful defense of the existence of God. One commentator calls Fénelon's *Traité* "a work that is as emotional as it is rational."[72] We may therefore see Fénelon and Bernardin as likeminded in their effort to allow a legitimate place for God to communicate truth via the human heart.

It is true that, from their common acceptance of knowledge from within, Fénelon and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre come to very different conclusions about the role of the Scriptures. However, since the Scriptures do not figure in Fénleon's *Traité* – whose arguments remain limited to natural revelation and metaphysical discussions – Bernardin is able to maintain his wholehearted endorsement of Fénelon.

Fénelon's *Traité* exhibits a precise apologetic aim: that of making a case for God's existence via natural revelation and metaphysical meditations. It is not concerned with proving the preeminence of Christianity, as is, for example, Pascal's *Pensées*, with its repeated references to Scripture and arguments to defend the truth, objectivity, and divine origin of the Bible. Instead, Fénelon's *Traité* seeks only to persuade its audience of the undeniability of the Creator; if it mentions Scripture five times over 170 pages, each reference is only in passing and not employed as a basis for argumentation. For this reason, though, one should not assume that the Scriptures were unimportant for Fénelon. In fact, his letters and sermons repeatedly cite and comment upon passages of Scripture, and his third Dialogue on Eloquence affirms the need for studying Scripture in its historical context in order to understand truth.[73] In one of his letters, Fénelon sketches the "Reflections of a man who knows no religion," which offers perhaps the fullest

[71] Ibid., 2:600
[72] Davis, *Fénelon*, 137.
[73] Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 1:59, 71.

account for Fénelon's vision of the role of natural revelation in leading people to God.[74] Recognizing that man as a created being has duties toward his Creator is only a prerequisite for investigating the Christian faith; once a man is humble toward God, he is faced with the necessity of evaluating the claims about Jesus Christ.[75] Eventually, he comes to realize that, among those who "worship a God without recognizing Jesus Christ" are only those who desire to worship God on their own self-made terms: "each follows his own fantasy; none of them is humble."[76] All of the arguments in Fénelon's *Traité*, then, might be viewed as simply the first step in acquiring knowledge about God. General revelation is a start, but special revelation is needed.

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, on the other hand, takes a different view. He does not, like Rousseau, take the Bible to be untrustworthy simply because it was revealed through men.[77] In fact, Bernardin does accept the Bible as a "divine book" and takes its historical accounts to be trustworthy even when they are hard to understand.[78] Yet he also severely compromises the relevance of the Bible by arguing that everything it contains conforms perfectly to the pre-established laws of nature.[79] While he presents this argument in a positive light in order to validate the Bible's divine origin,[80] it is impossible that such a claim does not lead to a diminished role of the Bible as a supplement to natural revelation. In fact, the story of Paul and Virginie never emphasizes Scripture as a means to know God. "From time to time" the children are said to enjoy "some touching story

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[74] Ibid., 1:757-762.

[75] "Mais il me reste une grande difficulté sur la religion. Maintenant je connais le Dieu qui m'a fait; mais je suis dans un pays où l'on adore Jésus comme Dieu: que dois-je croire là-dessus?" Ibid., 1:760.

[76] "Les particuliers qui adorent un Dieu sans reconnaître Jésus-Christ [...]. Chacun suit sa fantaisie: aucun d'eux n'est humble." Ibid., 1:762.

[77] Rousseau, *Émile*, 387-888.

[78] Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la nature*, 126-127, 199.

[79] Ibid., 200.

[80] "C'est le caractère d'une religion divinement inspirée, de convenir parfaitement au bonheur des hommes, et aux lois précédemment établis par l'Auteur de la nature. C'est par ce défaut de convenance qu'on peut distinguer toutes les fausses religions." Ibid.

from the Old or New Testament;" however, "they reasoned little on these sacred books, for their theology was all feeling, like nature's theology."[81] Bernardin himself claimed that "the pure laws of the Gospel are those of nature," revealing an attitude that effectively makes the Bible unnecessary as God has sufficiently revealed himself through nature.[82]

Given Bernardin's non-orthodox beliefs regarding the sufficiency of natural revelation, then, it is understandable that he would have been particularly attracted to a work of apologetics like Fénelon's, one that is limited to proving God's existence and does not venture further into the details of Christian theology. As a matter of fact, if Bernardin's understanding of Fénelon was informed only by those major works like *Télémaque* and the *Traité de l'existence de Dieu*, it is possible he might not even have suspected that Fénelon's beliefs were any more orthodox than his own.

In all, this chapter has sought to demonstrate that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's preference for Fénelon over other Christian thinkers is hardly arbitrary. We have observed, on the one hand, a multitude of Fénelon's ideas that Bernardin could whole-heartedly agree with: the idea that sentiment plays a role in gaining knowledge about God; the idea that a lifestyle of simplicity, virtue, and harmony with nature is an ideal that we should strive for; the idea that our goal in life should be to please God even if it means giving up the self; and the idea that true religion takes place in the heart and is motivated by love and gratitude rather than fear. Furthermore, Bernardin's frequent references to Fénelon demonstrate that at least some of these ideas were directly inspired

[81] "De temps en temps madame de la Tour lisait publiquement quelque histoire touchante de l'Ancien ou du Nouveau Testament. Ils raisonnaient peu sur ces livres sacrés; car leur théologie était toute en sentiment, comme celle de la nature." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 119-120.
[82] Cited in Wiedemeier, *La Religion de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, 147.

from him, even if they were shared by other thinkers of the same time period. On the other hand, though, we have also observed ideas that were not shared by both Fénelon and Bernardin. In particular, Bernardin's non-orthodox religious beliefs concerning man's natural goodness and the sufficiency of natural revelation beg the question of how he could retain such enthusiastic endorsement, even hyperbolic praise, for Fénelon. Our investigation has yielded one more reason why Bernardin found Fénelon to be a particularly profitable inspiration. The answer lies in the limited scope and subject matter of Fénelon's two most well-known works, or at least those two works most referenced by Bernardin. As neither *Télémaque* nor *Traité de l'existence de Dieu* make an issue of the orthodox doctrines that Bernardin denies, they present no threats to his beliefs. Instead, they allow him the possibility of ignoring or even re-interpreting Fénelon's thought to be wholly consistent with his own.

Conclusion

In the friendship of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jacques Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, François Fénelon was not only a topic of conversation, but an object of mutual praise and admiration.[1] Rousseau's fondness for Fénelon is well attested, even if it has not been directly addressed in this paper.[2] Might Fénelon's influence on Rousseau, then, invalidate my claim that Bernardin was separately influenced by both men, and that his novel *Paul et Virginie* represents a synthesis of Fénelonian and Rousseauian beliefs? Not at all. Bernardin is certainly heavily influenced by Rousseau, but he stops short of fully reproducing Rousseau's arguments in a manner that reveals his affinity with Fénelon. This paper has addressed not only the aspects of Fénelonian theology that Bernardin found attractive, but also how the latter may have misinterpreted Fénelon, crafting him according to his own liking.

Notwithstanding any misinterpretations of Fénelon, both Rousseau and Bernardin speak freely of their love for him, but Bernardin is by far the more loyal of the two. It should be evident from the discussion in Chapters One and Two that the primacy of self-sufficiency in Rousseau's philosophy cannot be reconciled with Fénelon's call to order all things around God rather than oneself. Rousseau urges Émile to "close up [his] existence around [himself]" to find peace, whereas Fénelon recommends "leaving oneself, forgetting oneself, losing oneself."[3] Rousseau may secularize Fénelon's ideal of

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[1] Rousseau and Bernardin's discussion of Fénelon can be attested in Bernardin, "La Vie de J.-J. Rousseau," 37, an anecdote repeated in Coleman, "Discourses of Dispossession," 316 and Rousseau, *Correspondance*, XLV, 288-289.

[2] See Chérel, *Fénelon au XVIIIe Siècle*, 143-144, 321, 393-398, 466-468; Coleman, "Discourses of Dispossession," 315-320; and Riley, "Introduction," xvi-xviii, xx-xxi, xxxii. Rousseau mentions Fénelon in *Émile*; *Confessions*, VI, XII; *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*, III; and *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*, III.

[3] "O homme! resserre ton existence au dedans de toi, et tu ne seras plus misérable." Rousseau, *Émile*, 98; "Sa gloire et sa perfection sont de sortir de soi, de s'oublier, de se perdre." Fénelon, *Oeuvres*, 1:669.

disinterestedness and disappropriation when it comes to political philosophy,[4] but his religious life is far from matching the humility and theocentricity of Fénelon's and Bernardin's. Rousseau opens his *Confessions* by calling upon God as his witness and challenging any man who has read his sincere account of himself to proclaim, on the day of judgment, "I was better than that man."[5] He is hardly ready to accept whatever plan God has for his life, in the way that Fénelon exhorts and Virginie exemplifies. As a matter of fact, according to Bernardin, Rousseau thought God even owes him a thing or two in the afterlife.[6] We may therefore conclude, along with Judith Shklar, that there is no room in Rousseau's thought for Fénelonian pure-hearted devotion to God. She writes:

> One must, to be sure, be very cautious in linking Rousseau to Fénelon, or to any other religious moralist of the century preceding his own. No superficial similarities can hide the fact that Rousseau was concerned with earthly felicity and they with eternal salvation.[7]

Whether Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was primarily concerned with eternal salvation is debatable, but there is no doubt about his heroine Virginie, whose focus on God and on heavenly realities governs all that she does. In her eyes, even her death is a triumphant victory, as it seals her life as one of obedience and self-sacrifice. The old man puts the following words in her mouth as he tries to encourage Paul to seek God's will for his life:

> Oh Paul! Life is nothing but a test. I have been found faithful to the laws of nature, love, and virtue. I have crossed the seas to obey my parents; I have renounced riches to preserve my faith; and I have preferred to lose my life rather than to violate modesty. Heaven has found my career sufficiently full. I have forever escaped poverty, slander, tempests, and the sight of others' suffering. None of the evils that terrify men can reach me any more; and you pity me! I am

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[4] For one treatment of the subject, see Coleman, "Discourses of Dispossession."
[5] "Que chacun d'eux découvre à son tour son coeur au pied de ton trône avec la même sincérité; et puis qu'un seul te dise, s'il l'ose: *Je fus meilleur que cet homme-là*." Rousseau, *Confessions*, 23-24.
[6] "il en concluait que la vue du désordre moral et d el'ordre naturel...: 'Il faut qu'il y ait une suite. [...] Je sens qu'il doit me revenir quelque chose.'" Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, "La Vie de J.-J. Rousseau," 33.
[7] Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, 4.

> pure and inalterable as a particle of light! [...] Endure the trial that has been given to you [...]. Raise your soul to the infinite to bear the pain of a moment.[8]

Virginie's death may be a triumph in her own eyes and the eyes of the old man, but neither Paul nor their mothers share such a heavenly perspective. Within a short time, they all die in their grief. Twenty years later, as the old man retells the story, even he seems to have exchanged his trust in God's goodness for melancholy and cynicism. It might be argued that the old man represents one who used to have an unwavering trust in the sovereignty of God, but could no longer keep his faith after witnessing the seemingly meaningless deaths of an entire family of good people. While he continued to live in solitude and in harmony with nature, he no longer saw God in God's creation, and thus turned into a bitter, unhappy man. As he finishes his story, he compares himself to "a traveler who wanders alone over the face of the earth."[9] What Bernardin thus may have intended as a warning never to lose sight of God turns out to be a somber presage of the next generation of Romantics who would join the old man in his solitary lament.

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[8] "Ô Paul! la vie n'est qu'une épreuve. J'ai été trouvée fidèle aux lois de la nature, de l'amour, et de la vertu. J'ai traversé les mers pour obéir à mes parents; j'ai renoncé aux richesses pour conserver ma foi; et j'ai mieux aimé perdre la vie que de violer la pudeur. Le ciel a trouvé ma carrière suffisamment remplie. J'ai échappé pour toujours à la poverté, à la calomnie, aux tempêtes, au spectacle des douleurs d'autrui. Aucun des maux qui effrayent les hommes ne peut plus désormais m'atteindre; et vous me plaignez! Je suis pure et inaltérable comme une particule de lumière! [...] Soutiens donc l'épreuve qui t'est donnée [...]. élève ton âme vers l'infini pour supporter des peines d'un moment." Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 195-196.

[9] "comme un voyageur qui erre sur la terre, où je suis resté seul." Ibid., 201.

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